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Nick Carter Stories

THE GIRL PRISONER
or Nick Carter's Flight in the Wasp

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NICK CARTER STORIES

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THE GIRL PRISONER;

Or, NICK CARTER'S FLIGHT IN THE "WASP."

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE OWNER OF THE FLYING BOAT.

"I never start anything unless I am willing to carry it through to the finish, no matter how long it may take."

That was Nick Carter's invariable rule.

The celebrated New York detective had never been known to withdraw from a case while there was a single thing left undone. Under his hands things usually came to a head in quick time, but, in exceptional cases, the numberless demands on his time caused cases to drag, in part, for considerable periods.

Nevertheless, his efficient system of keeping track of his cases enabled him to turn to them again and again until there was nothing more left to be desired.

The Duffy-gang affair was one instance.

Nick and his assistants had had three encounters with it and had made three hauls, which had resulted in the capture of George Duffy himself, the leader and a yeggman with a long criminal record, his young, pretty, and exceptional daring wife, Winnie Duffy—or "Ruth Dudley," as she sometimes called herself—and several lesser members of the band, which had been terrorizing the shores of Long Island Sound by their unusually mysterious and successful robberies of banks and luxurious country homes.

The woman, in fact, had been captured twice, for she had managed to make her escape a few hours after being lodged in jail, her only "tool" being a cake of soap. She had made use of her temporary liberty by planning and carrying out a couple of other masterly crimes, but a third one had ended disastrously for three members of the band.

She had succeeded in escaping from the scene of the attempted crime in a flying boat, which had mysteriously come to her aid. Her hope had evidently been that the means employed for her escape would remain unexplained, but when she had discovered, while her aërial craft was soaring about overhead, that Nick Carter had already guessed the secret, she had swooped down close to the detectives and his associates, and had tried to destroy them and their motor cars by means of a couple of aërial bombs.

Her daring attempt failed, she was wounded, and the flying boat suffered injury. It sailed along for some distance in a crippled condition, close to the ground, and the detectives followed it in one of Nick's cars.

Finally it had begun to rise, and when about three hundred feet up its pursuers had been horrified to see a human body hurtling down from it. The unfortunate fell into a small lake, and the lightened biplane had risen, till somewhat lamely, and disappeared into the night.

The victim of the plunge proved to be Winnie Duffy herself, who thus finally fell into the detectives' hands, more dead than alive.

She recovered, was tried, together with her husband and the rest, and was sentenced to serve a rather lengthy term in the prison for women at Auburn, New York.

Much of the booty which had been secured by the robbers was recovered, after a great deal of trouble, but the biggest part of it still remained unaccounted for. Moreover, the aviator who had come to the girl's assistance that night—and had probably helped her in at least one of her other robberies—had made good his escape.

Therefore, Nick Carter could not yet write "Closed" across the records of the sensational case, in spite of all that had been accomplished.

As soon as opportunity offered, after Winnie's second arrest, the detective had set to work to trace the flying boat, and, through it, the man who had piloted it so intrepidly.

As might have been expected, it proved to be a comparatively simple task to identify the air craft.

Nick and his assistants had obtained a close view

of it while it was hovering over them, and they knew that only one company manufactured that particular type of hydroaëroplane. The president of the company, a former professional aviator of renown, was appealed to, and he readily furnished a list of all those to whom his flying boats had been sold.

After that it was merely a matter of sifting. The disabled biplane, the boat-shaped underbody of which still showed the marks left by the detectives' bullets, was quickly located.

But at that point Nick was forced to pause.

The plane proved to be the property of no less a man than "Ned" Lyford, a bachelor clubman of large means, and one of the best known of amateur aviators. Lyford was a highly accomplished man of perhaps thirty-five, a globe-trotter, a leader of the younger social set, and maintained a fine town house on Riverside Drive and a beautiful country place at Rye, on Long Island Sound.

No slightest whisper of suspicion had ever been heard about him, and it seemed obviously out of the question to suppose that he had piloted his flying boat on the night in question, or, indeed, could have anything whatever to do with the Duffy gang.

Then who had been Winnie's birdman?

Well, Lyford employed—or had employed—a professional aviator, a sort of aërial chauffeur, in the person of a certain Jimmy Hare.

Hare was a dare-devil young fellow of twenty-two or so, who had been a trick bicyclist in vaudeville until he took up the flying game. He had a reputation for recklessness of all sorts, had been discharged the morning after the affair, and had disappeared.

These facts Nick obtained in part from gossip among aviators, and in part from Lyford himself, upon whom he promptly called.

The clubman readily admitted that his biplane was damaged.

"I found it out yesterday morning," he declared, when Nick interviewed him in the library of his home at Rye. "You may be sure I hauled Hare over the coals. I have suspected once or twice before that he had taken the plane out at night without my knowledge, but nothing ever happened, and I couldn't prove it against his up-and-down denials. He's the joy-riding kind, but he was too useful to me, and knew his business too thoroughly to let him go merely on suspicion. When I found the condition the plane was in yesterday morning, however, there was nothing to do but bounce him, and I didn't mince matters about it. I told him I was done with him, and I invited him to pack up his things and go. He went, and I have no idea where he is now. If he was really mixed up in anything criminal, I'm afraid my hasty action has given you a hard row to hoe, Carter, but it never occurred to me at the time."

"Didn't you see the bullet holes?" Nick inquired.

Lyford nodded in a matter-of-fact way.

"I certainly did," he replied easily. "I didn't know what they were at first, for you must remember that I haven't had your experience in such connections. However, I nosed about a bit and soon found a bullet imbedded in one of the holes."

"Yet that didn't suggest to you that it might be well to keep Hare where the authorities could lay their hands on him if they wanted to?" the detective asked mildly.

The look Lyford gave him was a direct one.

"You're too many for me, Carter," the young clubman returned, with an amused grin. "I'll have to 'fess up, I see. I'm not such a fool as not to have guessed that Jimmy had possibly been in serious mischief, but you know how it is. Fellows situated as I am hate like thunder to be dragged into the newspapers in connection with anything questionable, even in the most indirect way. I felt obliged to act in self-defense. I didn't question Hare about the night's escapade because I did not want to know anything about it. I really did not believe that it could be anything very bad, because I have never believed Jimmy capable of anything more than a few reckless pranks. It was apparent, however, that his latest stunt might have been something more. I hoped not, but I felt it necessary to do what I could to shield myself. Whatever else he had done, he had played the dickens with a five-thousand-dollar biplane, and I was perfectly justified in discharging him—could have done nothing less, in fact. Therefore, I did not only the natural thing, but also the thing that would prevent his being hounded down, perhaps, and arrested on my place, to the great delight of the reporters. Can you blame me?"

"I suppose not," Carter replied thoughtfully.

He left Rye soon afterward and returned home in a brown study.

The problem which confronted him was an unusually complicated one. Lyford appeared to be entirely above suspicion, and his attitude and explanation had been perfectly natural, under the circumstances. A roving, irresponsible young fellow, such as Jimmy Hare undoubtedly was, was much more open to suspicion, of course; but, on the other hand, those very well-known qualities of his would make it easy for any one—his employer, for instance—to throw upon him a burden of guilt what was not rightfully his.

Because of that and certain other things, Nick Carter found it impossible to be altogether satisfied with Lyford's version of the matter.

It was not necessary to suppose that the clubman himself had been Winnie's accomplice. He might possibly have loaned the flying boat to one of his friends, two or three of whom, it appeared, had studied aviation for the sport and had secured pilots' licenses, without, however, possessing aëroplanes of their own.

But, no matter whether he or some one else had been with the girl in the air, it would probably have been a comparatively simple matter to buy Hare's silence and his consent to disappear and allow the blame to be saddled on him. The price would unquestionably have been a stiff one, but it was generally understood in aviation circles that Hare had no one to think of but himself, and he seemed to be the sort of chap who might not be above earning a few thousands in that way, especially if there was little likelihood of anything being proved either way.

Jimmy might, of course, be guilty. Nick was not ready to take any definite stand against that theory. He wanted to know more, and Jimmy Hare was the most likely source of information. The first thing was to find out if Jimmy had actually disappeared. If he had really piloted the flying boat that night, he had doubtless made himself as scarce as possible by that time. If, on the other hand, he had been paid to vanish, it was possible that he had not done so very thoroughly.

Diligent search failed to reveal him, though. His cronies

all professed entire ignorance of his whereabouts, and he had not been seen in his usual haunts since the day before Winnie's capture.

That looked bad for him, but it was not necessarily conclusive. If he had been hired to be the scapegoat for Lyford or one of Lyford's intimates, the completeness of his disappearance might only indicate a conscientious desire to earn his fee.

In any case, however, it did not look at that stage as if the aviator, whoever he had been, was identified with the Duffy gang in any real way. It seemed much more reasonable to suppose that he had been captivated by Winnie, and had foolishly allowed himself to be tempted into aiding her in two or three of her more or less daring and romantic burglaries.

She was certainly attractive enough to have made a reckless and adventurous young man forget himself to that extent, and the fact that her husband was in jail at the time would have given her opportunity to exercise her wiles in such a way if she had been so inclined.

If that were the case, though, Nick had reason to believe that Winnie had at least known her victim before her first arrest.

On the night of her amazing escape from the Larchmont jail—she had undressed, bundled up her clothing, rubbed herself all over with moistened soap, and crawled through a slit of a window about six inches wide—a woman had been seen at a late hour trudging along the road to Rye. She had been seen by a party of motorists, whose description of her costume had agreed in all essentials with the clothing which she had worn at the time of her arrest, a few hours before.

The detective and his assistants had believed all along that this lonely looking pedestrian, who had tried to escape notice, was the Duffy woman, but they had failed to obtain proof of that. Now, since the flying boat had been located in Rye, it became practically certain that she had sought refuge there on the night of her escape, which suggested that she had been more or less sure of her welcome somewhere in the village, presumably on the Lyford estate.

As for the girl herself, she had steadfastly refused to implicate any one in connection with the night's work, which had ended so disastrously for her.

Such was the situation on the morning which brought the detective a very significant letter from Winnie, written in her prison cell.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL PRISONER'S URGENT APPEAL.

Nick opened it at the breakfast table, in the presence of Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan, his best-known assistants. He read it through silently and then looked up, with a peculiar expression on his face.

"I have a very urgent appeal here from Winnie Duffy," he said quietly. "She wants me to come up to Auburn at once and hear what she has to tell me."

Chick whistled.

"The deuce you say!" he exclaimed. "Well, I can't say I'm greatly surprised. I've been looking for some such move on her part."

"Same here," contributed Patsy. "Take it from me, that dame has something on her mind besides her hair. She's been giving a pretty good imitation of a clam, but it couldn't last. The judge made her a present of a pretty long vacation up the State, and I have a notion she wants some more company."

Nick's smile was a bit grim.

"Yes, we are all more or less of one mind, it seems," he agreed. "I, too, have been hoping for developments along that line, but not counting on them. You know and I know that there was something more than commonly queer about the way that young woman fell out of the biplane. We've spoken of it more than once, and wondered whether she realized it as well as we did. Sometimes it seemed as if she accepted it without question, while at others, in spite of the close mouth she kept, I would almost have sworn that she was nursing a grievance. Now that theory seems to be justified."

"She didn't fall from the plane—she was thrown!" Chick declared positively. "When we nearly put his motor out of business with those shots, he probably got panicky, laid the blame all on her for getting him into such an infernal mess, and made up his mind to pitch her overboard, either to get even with her or else because the plane would fly better with one less to weight it down. It was a nice, manly thing to do, especially when the girl was wounded and probably unconscious, but that's evidently what he did. My opinion is that he deliberately tried to murder her, and the only reason he didn't succeed was that he failed to see that she would fall into the lake."

"That's about the way I size it up," commented Nick. "We're all pretty sure we know when she was wounded, and she certainly disappeared after that, as if she had sunk back into the boat. We did not see her again until she was falling. Of course, we did not see him throw her over, and it's theoretically possible that she jumped for some reason. That, however, doesn't agree at all with what we know of Winnie's character. She has obstinacy and grit enough for a dozen ordinary men. She would never give up or try to do away with herself, and there does not seem to be any way in which she could have fallen accidentally. For these reasons I have hoped all along that Winnie would realize what must have happened and turn against him. As you know, I repeatedly tried to set her thinking about it and urged her to tell me who he was, but she pretended not to know what I was talking about and refused to give me the slightest clew to his identity. Failing in that, I tried to locate him without her aid, with what success you know. I haven't for a moment given up the hope, though, that sooner or later she would decide to make him pay for his murderous treatment of her. Now she seems to have done so, and the prospects seem to be good for a quick untangling of the snarl. If what she says is true, however, I'm afraid it isn't going to be very easy to put the man behind bars."

"Why? What does she say?" Patsy asked quickly.

"Here is the letter," Nick replied, handing it across the table to young Garvan. "It has evidently escaped the prison censor by being sent by way of the 'underground.' Read it aloud, Patsy."

The younger assistant took it, glanced at it curiously for a moment, and then began:

"'WOMEN'S PRISON, Auburn, N. Y.

"'MY DEAR MR. CARTER: I have been guilty of disrespect in the past, in addressing you as "Dear Nick" and so on, when I was so cocksure of my cleverness that I

thought I could play with you. I know better now, and am in no such mood. This place doesn't encourage such things.

"'Mr. Carter, I beg you to come up here as soon as you possibly can. I wish to tell you something—something which you urged me to confess, but which I could not bring myself to reveal at that time. I am ready to tell all now, in one connection. It will be well worth your while, I can assure you.

"'I do not dare put the facts on paper, or even to refer to them more plainly here. The truth is that I am already in the very gravest danger, and when I sign my name to this I may be signing my death warrant.

"'You doubtless read in the papers that portion of the prison here was mysteriously blown up the other day. It was part of the wing in which I was confined. Two of the prisoners were killed and several badly injured. I have since had notice served on me that the explosion was designed for me. Other attempts on my life have also been made, and I am afraid that you will be exposed to similar attempts if it becomes known in certai quarters that you have been up here to see me. I know, however, that you are used to such dangers and have always miraculously escaped death.

"'Please come, but try in every way possible to keep your identity and destination secret. I am giving this to a trusty who is friendly to me, I believe, and can be depended on to see that it is mailed outside. Do not fail me, I beseech you, but do not try to write. Sincerely yours, WINNIE C. DUFFY.'"

"Gee, that doesn't sound much like the woman who was defying everybody and everything a little while ago, does it?" Patsy remarked, when he had finished reading this intensely earnest plea. "There's nothing phony about that. She means just what she says. But what the dickens do you suppose she's getting at? Is that aviator fellow actually trying to get her to keep her from snitching, or is she just seeing things in the dark?"

"It does sound a little wild," declared Nick, "but I am willing to believe she has grounds for all she says. Winnie is about the last woman I would expect to see developing delusions of persecution. She's altogether too healthy for that. If she hasn't exaggerated, however, I'm afraid we shall have to revise our theories about the man in the case. If he is actually hounding her in this fashion, even after she has begun to pay the penalty for her crimes, and while he is still at large, he must be unusually vindictive and relentless, or——"

"Or unusually afraid," put in Chick.

"Exactly," agreed Nick, with an emphatic nod. "And although the latter supposition would fit in perfectly with the theory that Lyford or one of his fashionable cronies is the guilty man, it wouldn't agree with our charitable view that the fellow started out to do it merely as a lark, and then threw her overboard in a moment of selfish, cowardly panic. The man who is trying so persistently to seal her lips forever, if any one is, is an out-and-out criminal of the blackest sort, with criminal cunning and resourcefulness at his command, not merely a scared man of wealth and position, or a mere light-hearted devil-may-care, such as Jimmy Hare is supposed to be. It may be Hare, or it may be Lyford, or one of Lyford's stamp, but, if so, he is something more than appears on the surface. He's not a new hand at crime, and it may well be that there is a bona-fide connection between him and the gang. He may be the man higher up, for all we know."

"Good heavens, that's right!" ejaculated Patsy. "Maybe that explains where most of the loot went to!"

"It wouldn't be so very surprising if it did," said Nick.

In view of the importance of the expected revelations, the detective dropped everything else for the time being and prepared to take an early train for Auburn.

He followed Winnie's suggestion, however, disguised himself as a minister, and was careful not to go directly from his house to the railroad station.

It was hard to believe that the aviator was nearly so dangerous or so well served as these precautions implied, but Nick did not know the facts as yet, and he was not going, if he could help it, to make the mistake of underrating the man's ability or power.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNUSUAL RUSE.

In fact, the foreboding tone of the letter had so impressed the great detective that he even took the trouble to leave his house on Madison Avenue by the back way, and on foot.

That ought to have been a sufficient safeguard against undesirable attention, but Nick had not gone a block before he began to have the feeling that he was being followed. He turned, took out his watch as if to see if he had time to go back, and then continued on his way.

The ruse had enabled him to see that there was a man slouching along on the other side of the street. The fellow had not been in sight when Nick emerged from the alley, but, of course, he might have come out of one of the houses on the block. Time would tell whether he were actually shadowing Carter or not.

In spite of his severely clerical garb, the detective was well armed, and he had his pocket burglars' kit and make-up case with him. He had not burdened himself with a suit case, however, partly because of his desire to avoid giving the impression that he was going a long distance.

He had given himself a wide margin of time before the departure of his train, therefore he was at liberty to take as indirect a route as he pleased. He did not attempt to double and twist, though, but kept on a direct course. Also, he did not look around again.

Instead, he took an inconspicuous little mirror from his pocket and held it up occasionally in such a way as to obtain a reflected view of the street behind him for some distance. The mirror told him, beyond a doubt, that the man was actually keeping an eye on him.

His shadow was of a type altogether too familiar to Nick. In appearance he was by no means what is called a tough. On the contrary, he was dressed in a ready-made suit of the latest and most extreme English cut, of a kind which a clothing advertisement would probably describe as "swagger" or "classy."

He was rather slim, but probably strong and wiry. His complexion was swarthy, and it suggested foreign blood. He was smoking a cigarette. In other words, despite the fact that the uninitiated would never think of him as dangerous in any way, Nick knew him at once as a gangster, and he suspected him of being a gunman.

His presence and his promptness in following the sup-

posed minister indicated that the situation was far more serious than Nick had been willing to believe. It was plain not only that the man who had it in for Winnie Duffy was in control of some sort of a criminal organization—or at least in league with it—but, also, that the detective's residence had been watched in an unusually thorough way, so thorough, in fact, as to reveal the circumstance that no such person as this minister appeared to be had entered there. And that meant that Winnie's enemies had expected her to appeal to Nick, and that they had been prepared to prevent a meeting at Auburn, no matter what disguise Nick might adopt.

Nick wished he had resorted to a still more complicated ruse, as he could easily have done if he had thought it necessary; but he decided not to turn back. It would mean a considerable delay if he missed that train.

His splendid disguise had evidently proved worthless at the very outset, but Nick Carter was still inside of that peaceful exterior, and he believed himself capable of taking care of himself.

He looked about him for a building in which he could play his old reliable elevator trick. If there had been any in that locality with more than one elevator shaft, which was familiar to him, he would have tried to lose his shadow in it; but he could think of none.

He wished to avoid any sort of open conflict with the fellow, for that would have delayed him, if nothing else. Therefore, he must think of some other way to outwit his tracker.

If he had had another outfit of clothing with him, he could easily have managed to make a change somewhere along the route, but, under the circumstances, that was out of the question.

The plan he finally hit upon, after looking at his watch again to see how much time he still had at his disposal, was an unusual one.

He suddenly reeled and fell, just as he was in the middle of a busy cross street.

He had taken pains, however, to see that his "seizure" took place under the watchful eyes of the traffic policeman stationed at that corner.

The bluecoat held up the traffic at once and ran to the supposed minister's side. A crowd collected, into which the puzzled gangster edged his way. Nick was apparently unconscious. The fellow thought he saw his chance.

"Officer, I know this minister—poor man!" he said, stepping forward. "I'll order a taxi and take him home."

"Who is he and where does he live?" the policeman asked promptly.

There was a slight pause before the gangster replied.

"He's Father Riley, one of the priests at the cathedral, He boards on East Fifty-eighth Street—number one hundred and thirteen A."

The traffic policeman looked his informant up and down searchingly. He, too, recognized the breed.

"You're under arrest, my friend!" he said quietly. "I know something about the good fathers at the cathedral, being an Irishman and a Catholic myself. There's no Father Riley there, so far as I know, and if there was, he wouldn't be boarding out like that—he'd be living with the rest of the staff. Besides, I don't like your looks!"

The gangster turned a little green and protested vehemently, but all to no avail. Nick, meanwhile, was enjoying the affair hugely. He had hoped for just this sort of an outcome, but, if the policeman had been taken in, he was prepared to come to life enough to deny any knowledge of the fellow, and then relapse into "unconsciousness" again.

The ambulance presently came along. It was from the Emergency Hospital, as the detective knew it would be. A very good friend of his was the resident physician in charge there, and he anticipated no difficulty in carrying out his scheme.

The gangster had already been turned over to a patrolman, and so was out of the way. As soon as Nick was tenderly lifted into the motor ambulance, he confided his identity to the young doctor who had responded to the call, admitted that there was nothing the matter with him, and promised to reward doctor and driver liberally for bringing them out unnecessarily.

The white-clad young ambulance surgeon entered delightedly into the plot, he declared his willingness to carry out his part of it to the best of his ability.

Consequently, the usual procedure was followed to the letter when the "patient" arrived at the hospital. Incidentally, however, the chief of the resident staff, Nick's friend, Doctor Wellman, was sent for.

Wellman was of practically the same build as the detective, so that there was no trouble about that part of it. He gladly loaned Nick a suit of clothes, which were donned in record time, The detective also speedily changed his facial appearance.

Thus, the man who left the hospital fifteen or twenty minutes later did not bear the slightest resemblance to the gray-haired minister who had so recently been admitted to it as a patient.

As for the rest, Doctor Wellman had promised to see, in person, any one who might inquire after the minister. He would inform the inquirer that the minister was still there, in a serious condition, and, as a little side issue, take a good look at the caller and furnish Nick with the man's description.

The transformed detective, having left his clerical garments behind, strode away briskly.

As luck would have it, he ran across a disengaged taxi after walking only two or three blocks. So far as he could tell, he had escaped from his enemies. He hailed the taxi, and, being pressed for time now, ordered the driver to make all speed for the Grand Central Terminal.

He just managed to catch his train.

The trip to Auburn, in the central part of the State, was a long and tedious one, but uneventful. Evidently, none of the aviator's hirelings was on board, or else a policy of watchful waiting was being followed for a change.

Nick did not arrive at his destination until late at night, and was, therefore, obliged to go to a hotel and register under an assumed name. He took every reasonable precaution against intrusion, because he half suspected that his ruse might have been discovered or guessed at, and that the birdman's agents in Auburn, who had already attempted to put Winnie Duffy out of the way, would try their best to locate him and prevent his communicating with the woman.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER.

Among other things, the detective took pains to secure a room which did not open on a fire escape.

He locked and bolted his door and wedged the transom so that it could not be opened without considerable noise. Nick smiled to himself as he noticed that the head of the bed was close beside the door. If any one tried to fire through the glass of the transom, the weapon would have to be held in such an awkward position that anything like accurate aim would be practically out of the question, and, anyhow, the detective's legs would be about the only part of his body within range.

Nick meant to make it as hard as he could for a would-be assassin, and, taking into account that fact that he always slept with at least one ear open, it did not seem likely that he could come to any harm during the night, unless his enemies should resort to some unusual and far-reaching means of destruction.

It had occurred to him that it might be well to engage the room immediately above and below him, as well as on either side, if they were vacant, but he dismissed that plan at once. Unless he wished to arouse all sorts of suspicion on the part of the hotel management, that would involve the necessity of making his true identity known. He did not care to do that, not knowing how far he could trust the hotel people.

Besides, such an attempt would show that he feared violence, and might have easily resulted in a refusal to rent him a room at all, on the plea that his presence might endanger the hotel property or the lives of the other guests.

Nick went to bed and promptly fell asleep. The night was a warm one, but he left the lower sash up only about a foot and pulled the dark shade down to the bottom of the sash. There was an arc light almost directly below the window, and Nick did not wish any more light than was absolutely necessary to enter the room. If there was any spying to be done through the transom, he preferred to force the spy to use an electric torch, if possible.

He had been asleep about two hours when he suddenly awoke, with every sense on the alert, but without moving a muscle. Another slight sound reached his ears from just outside of his door. Some one was moving very cautiously.

The detective opened his eyes, knowing that his face was invisible from the transom. The absence of light above the door told him at once that near-by incandescents in the corridor had been tampered with. There was no doubt that he had been traced. Probably there had been more than one man on his trail in New York. That was quite possible, for the second shadow could have kept much farther in the background and held himself in reserve for an emergency. He could have followed the ambulance to the hospital, and, whether he had actually trailed the detective to the Grand Central Terminal or not, might have felt sure that the priest's illness was a blind, and that Nick might be counted on to take that particular train, which made far better connections than any other.

At any rate, he had been waited for in Auburn, and the gang had lost little time in getting down to business.

Nick felt sure that the man outside was now standing on something—probably a folding stool. The detective's automatic was under his pillow. He reached for it noiselessly. Without warning, he threw himself off the bed—he had been sleeping without covers—and sprang to the door.

A stifled exclamation, followed by a clawing for support, and then a thud, informed him that the man had lost his balance in trying to get down quickly.

It was the work of only a moment or two for the detective to unfasten the door and throw it open, but the fellow had already picked himself up and taken to his heels.

He was making for one end of the dark corridor, where, perhaps twenty feet away, was an open window looking out on a fire escape. That had doubtless been his route in coming.

"Halt!" called the detective.

But instead of obeying the ringing command, the rascal swerved aside and took refuge behind the farther end of a large steam radiator.

There was no other shelter of the same sort for Nick, and, even if he could have been persuaded to retreat to his room, he would have been in danger of being shot in the back. So Nick lunged after the fellow, and, before the latter could guess his intention, threw himself behind the other end of the same radiator.

It was a deadlock after that. Neither could shoot the other without exposing himself to a like fate, and the detective, for one, had no desire to resort to bloodshed.

Doors were opened cautiously here and there, and excitement was soon rampant. Several employees of the hotel arrived on the run. Nick informed them of his identity, since there was no use of longer concealment in that respect, and asked that the police be telephoned for.

The officers soon arrived, and three of them, in accordance with Nick's indirectly transmitted instructions, came up the fire escape and took the scoundrel in the rear, while others advanced along the corridor.

The intruder saw that resistance was useless, and sullenly surrendered. He was locked up in short order on the charge of attempted burglary, that being the only one which stood much chance of being sustained so long as Nick had not given the gangster a chance to make any actual attempt on his life.

As soon as circumstances permitted, Nick Carter returned to bed, and he once more showed his remarkable self-control by dropping off to sleep in barely ten minutes after his head touched the pillow.

He was inclined to believe that the gang would not try anything more that night after such a discouraging failure, but, if he should chance to be wrong, he saw nothing to be gained by lying awake and wondering what was going to happen next.

It was just as well that he did, for he could hardly have guarded against the next attempt of Winnie's enemies, so diabolically planned was it.

He was aroused this time, about an hour later, by a sound that might almost have been the crack of doom. It was meant to be just that for Nick, and it came uncomfortably near doing the work that had been mapped out for it.

The sound was a deafening one, and it brought Nick to a sitting posture before he was fairly awake. It seemed as if the heavens were falling. Certainly the ceiling was.

The detective instinctively rolled off his bed and sought shelter under it.

It seemed as if tons of plastering and other débris descended upon him while he was doing it, but he arched his back, drew his head in as much as he could, and took what came. He was black and blue from head to foot before he reached safety, and covered with plaster dust, much of which went up his nostrils and down his throat, causing him to gasp and cough painfully.

But he had escaped without serious injury, thanks to his quick action and to the fact that the center of destruction was not directly over his head.

There was not much room for doubt as to what had happened.

CHAPTER V.

AN INFERNAL MACHINE.

A bomb or infernal machine must have been set off in the room just above by some one who was familiar enough with explosives to know, that, while most if not all of them follow the line of least resistance, that does not mean that they exert the greatest influence upward, through the air.

One unacquainted with the behavior of the stuff would suppose that, if a charge of dynamite were placed on top of a rock and exploded, its force would largely expend itself in the air, with comparatively little damage to the rock. Such is not the case, however. The exploding dynamite follows the line of least resistance, to be sure, but, as a matter of fact, it is the solid rock and not the air which offers the minimum of resistance. The rock, because it is solid, cannot give way without being split to pieces. The air, because it is elastic, gives back at first, before the expanding gases, and then quickly becomes so dense by compression that the force of the explosion finds it easier to destroy the rock than to overcome the tremendous resistance of the banked air above.

That was doubtless why Nick's enemies had chosen the room above him for the scene of the explosion, instead of that below. They counted on the "kick" of the explosive to destroy the floor and ceiling just above the detective's head.

If the terrible concussion from the explosion itself did not kill him, they doubtless reasoned that the avalanche of wreckage would.

The sensational affair was unusually well planned, on the whole, as soon became apparent, but its authors had made one slight mistake. It was that mistake which saved Nick's life, in all probability.

It lay in assuming that the furniture in the two rooms was arranged in the same way.

A man had taken the room above soon after Nick had retired to his. It was plain that he had meant to keep in the background, in the hope that his fellow conspirator would succeed in the simpler attempt on the detective's life, which the detective had nipped in the bud. However, he had brought with him the means of ending Nick, as he believed, if the other venture should go wrong.

When things had quieted down after the first rascal's arrest, the second one had made ready to carry out his infinitely more sensational plot.

He had evidently placed his deadly contrivance under his bed, on the supposition that Nick's bed was immediately under it. As it happened, however, the two rooms, although corresponding exactly in size and shape, were differently arranged. Nick's bed was immediately to the left of the door, as one entered, while that of his murderous neighbor above was against the side wall, several feet nearer the window.

After placing the clockwork infernal machine to his satisfaction, the man had timed it to go off barely three minutes after he left the room. He had taken his own life in his hand, therefore, and must have had great confidence in the reliability of the thing, or else he was more than ordinarily reckless.

Those few minutes of grace, though, were a necessary part of the scheme. To have allowed more would have been to risk failure.

The scoundrel had waited until he dared not wait any longer. Then, having pulled on his pajamas over his clothing, he had rushed out and along the corridor to the stairway, leaving his door open. Seemingly panic-stricken, he had raced downstairs, without waiting for the elevator. Two floors below he had run into a bell boy.

"There's a bomb or something under my bed!" he had cried hoarsely, taking care not to make too much noise. "The building will be blown up in a minute!"

With that he continued his headlong flight, seemingly unable to say anything more definite. The bell boy thought he was crazy, or, at least, hoped he was. Better a crazy man than an explosion. He let the fellow pass him and then made tracks after him as fast as he could, not with the intention of overtaking him, but rather from a desire to get as far away from the man's room as possible. There might be something in that bomb tip, after all.

Thus the rascal had continued his carefully planned escape. He burst into the lobby, at length, waving his arms and fighting for breath, as it appeared. There he reiterated his sensational announcement, this time at the top of his voice. He undoubtedly considered himself far enough away now to prevent any interference with the infernal machine before it was ready to go off.

At any rate, he calmed down enough to inform the night clerk that he had heard a persistent ticking sound. He said he had heard it ever since he entered the room assigned to him, but had paid no particular attention to it while he was undressing.

"I thought it was a clock, somewhere," he said breathlessly, "and never thought to see if there was a clock anywhere in the room. I was nearly dead for sleep, and I dropped off about as soon as I hit the hay. Something woke me up just now, though, and that infernal ticking got on my nerves. I got up and turned on the light. It was coming from under my bed, and I saw a queer-looking box there. That was enough for me!"

Just then the explosion shook the building from roof to cellar.

When the rumbling of the falling débris and the tinkling of breaking windows had died away, the night clerk and the few others on duty recovered from their stupor of fright and ran for the elevator, bent upon seeing what damage had been done and how many were injured.

The man's startling account had been fully vindicated, to all appearance, and it did not occur to them to detain him. Consequently they were not aware, in their excitement, that he had failed to follow.

And, by the time they learned Nick Carter's version of

the affair, the man in pajamas was nowhere to be found. The pajamas were located, to be sure, but not their wearer. He had doubtless ripped them off as soon as he was left alone, and had made good his escape in the clothing which he had worn underneath.

The man was arrested in Syracuse the next day, however, on the strength of the description given by the hotel clerk. He had been so sure of "getting" the detective and leaving a baffling mystery behind him that he had slighted his disguise.

Fortunately, except for broken windows and minor injuries to walls and ceilings, the explosion confined its work of destruction almost exclusively to the two rooms, and the detective's slight injuries were the worst of any sustained.

Nick made what amends he could to the management, was assigned to another room, and presently dropped off to sleep again, wondering what more adventures were to be his before he obtained that much-dreaded—by somebody—interview with Winnie Duffy, and what would happen afterward.

If the girl's enemies were willing to go to such lengths to prevent a meeting between her and the detective, what might they not do when that meeting had actually taken place and Nick was in possession of Winnie's confession?

CHAPTER VI.

SOME SHARP POINTS.

In spite of his agent's lack of success so far, however, the controlling spirit of the gang had seemingly refused to give up hope of interfering with Nick Carter's errand.

On the other hand, the Auburn police were naturally put on their mettle by the two attempts on the great detective's life within so short a time after his arrival in the town.

As a result of their increased activity, a close watch was kept on all strangers who gave the slightest indication of being there on a suspicious errand. But that seemed to present no difficulties to the detective's enemies, for it was a man who had lived in Auburn for years who figured in the next effort to keep Nick away from the prison.

The roots of the criminal conspiracy seemed to go very deep and reach very far.

The hotel at which Nick had stayed overnight, under such exciting circumstances, was by far the largest and best the place afforded. Among other advantages, it had an arrangement with a local man who owned and drove one of the few taxis in the town, and who was always ready on call to serve such of the guests as desired a motor cab instead of the old-fashioned, horse-drawn kind.

The hotel was some distance from the prison, and Nick naturally decided to patronize this man. It seemed perfectly safe to do so, since he was regularly employed by the hotel—much safer, in fact, than to trust himself to an outside man. The taxi was, accordingly, ordered immediately after breakfast, which had passed uneventually.

Nick was ready for it when it arrived, for he was, of course, anxious to see the prisoner before anything more developed with cyclonic suddenness.

Apparently, however, the driver was not quite ready for him when he approached the machine. The man had his head and shoulders inside the cab, and he seemed to be doing something with the cushions.

As Nick crossed the sidewalk, the driver made a few hasty movements, in the nature of final touches. His manner seemed flurried when he turned and touched his cap respectfully.

"I was just shakin' th' dust off of them cushions, sir," he explained.

His eyes were inclined to shiftiness, and his manner was obviously embarrassed. Nick knew by that time that eternal vigilance was necessary in Auburn if he expected to accomplish his mission and get away again with a fairly whole skin. He did not like the man's actions, and he instantly made up his mind to look into the matter of the "dusting" that had just been done.

The chauffeur stepped aside, and Nick entered the cab. Instead of sitting down, however, he deliberately turned and inspected the seat. Almost immediately his keen eyes caught sight of a tiny steel point, which protruded hardly more than a quarter of an inch from the leather cushion.

He turned part way, so that he could see the driver out of the corner of one eye, then he jerked the cushion from the seat and turned it over.

Four flattened lumps of solder greeted his sight on the under side of the cushion. They seemed attached to the leather. He took hold of one of them and pulled it away. As he had expected, it formed a crudely shaped base for a long, sharp needle, the eye end of which was imbedded in the solder.

Being careful to keep his fingers away from the point of the needle, he turned to the cringing driver, who had started to mount to his seat in front.

"I can't say I like your way of 'dusting,' my friend!" he said quietly. "Consider yourself under arrest, on the charge of attempted murder!"

The fellow's face was quickly distorted into a snarl, and his hand made a sudden move toward his pocket. Nick was too quick for him. Before he could draw his own weapon, a wicked-looking little ten-shot automatic confronted him.

"None of that!" Nick said sternly. "March ahead of me into the hotel, and if you make one false move, no matter how slight, you'll know how it feels to have a bullet in your back!"

One of the bell boys had been looking out, and he had witnessed this amazing scene. He had excitedly passed along the word to several of the other bell boys, the day clerk, and the manager, all of whom happened to be in the lobby at the time. Therefore, when Nick brought his prisoner in and asked the clerk to disarm him, the two were greeted with the greatest surprise and consternation.

It seemed incredible to the hotel people that this man, Will Short, who had been a resident of Auburn for years, and had always been thought reliable, except for a tendency to go on mild periodical drunks, should have actually made an attempt on the detective's life.

The evidence could not be explained away, however, and Short was soon under lock and key in the local jail.

The detective removed the three remaining needles, and he pointed out to the authorities the fact that the point of each of them had been dipped in some almost colorless liquid, which had crystallized as it dried.

"We have here a 'poison-needle' case, of one sort, gen-

tlemen," he declared positively. "It only remains to be seen what the nature of the poison is. Short is, obviously, also in league with my enterprising enemies, and he had probably been warned to expect a call from the hotel this morning, to take me to the prison. Somebody thoughtfully supplied him with these little pointers, but apparently he was not sure that I was the one who wanted the taxi until he arrived at the hotel. Then he had to hurry his preparations, and I caught him at them, luckily for me. If my suspicions hadn't been aroused by his manners, one or more of these needles would certainly have pricked me badly when I sat down. I suspect that they weren't meant to show above the top of the cushion, but, in his haste, Short left one slightly exposed. I probably should have removed the cushion, anyway, even if I had not seen that telltale point, but I may not have done so. I'm glad I did."

"I should think so!" ejaculated the chief of police. "In the name of all that's infernal, what are we up against, Carter? We've always thought that Auburn was a fairly law-abiding place, but the devil seems to be at work here since you arrived last night! I was kidding myself along with the notion that it was all the work of outsiders, and now Will Short, who has never been anybody's enemy but his own, is pinched in a cold-blooded attempt to do for you. And such an attempt! Short is an American, but this poison-needle business isn't American—it's too dirty for anything but the worst foreign scum!"

Nick smiled a little at the chief's vehemence.

"It's safe to say that Short's brain is not responsible for it," he said, "but it isn't necessarily foreign, and you call it 'dirty,' I imagine, merely because it is unusual and hard to guard against—because it isn't exactly a sporting proposition, and was designed to take an unfair advantage. But that's the essence of crime, isn't it—taking an unfair advantage, 'getting' a man when he isn't looking? The criminal always plays with loaded dice, no matter whether he uses a revolver or a pair of scissors."

"I suppose so," the chief of police agreed vehemently, "but some things seem too low-down for even a decent criminal to stomach. This strikes me as one of them."

"That's one way of looking at it," replied Nick, with a shrug. "Another is that criminals are getting the 'efficiency' bee in their bonnets, like everybody else. If a pin prick will do the work of a Gatling gun, and leave only a very minute puncture in the skin, which may never be found, much less traced to its cause, efficiency naturally demands that the pin be used. Criminals are moving with the times, that's all. They are using more and more subtle and scientific methods, some of them, and it takes some sprinting on our part to keep at least one jump ahead of them. But that's what we have to do, and we must expect them to make it as hard for us as they can, not as easy. This isn't going to get me to the prison, though."

The chief insisted upon sending a couple of his men along with Nick. The latter objected at first, but finally consented. The gang might think he was afraid, but what of that? Nick could stand it, and the belief might give his enemies a false confidence that would possibly play into his hands.

Therefore, when the detective made a fresh start from the hotel, in a livery hack this time, two policemen in uniform rode with him.

Incidentally, it may be said in passing that a subsequent analysis of the stuff on the needle points proved it to be a virulent poison, the chief constituent of which was deadly aconite.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANGED WINNIE.

The drive to the prison was far less stirring than if the occupants of the carriage had been a newly married couple setting off on their honeymoon.

The gang seemed to be wearied of wrongdoing for the time being. At any rate, whatever the reason for the peaceful trip, Nick was soon deposited safely in front of the prison entrance.

He left his blue-coated guardians outside, and, being now no longer in the disguise which had failed to protect him, sent his name in to the matron of the woman's department, who was already known to him.

Mrs. Duke—for that was her name—quickly received him in her office. She was an aggressive, sharp-eyed woman of middle age, very capable and businesslike, but hard, and not exactly pleasing in her personality. Just now she seemed to be worried about something, and not altogether pleased to see the famous detective.

In fact, she seemed a little startled by his unexpected visit, and she was plainly taken aback when he asked permission to see Winnie Duffy.

It did not take Nick long to guess what the trouble was.

He had no intention, of course, of informing her that the prisoner had sent for him by means of a letter which had been smuggled out. That sort of information is not especially pleasing to a prison official, and that there was no good reason in this instance for divulging it. Nevertheless, Nick felt sure that Mrs. Duke did not look upon his visit as merely a chance one. She must have suspected that he had got wind of what had been going on there, and the detective took it for granted that she was wondering how much he knew, and how much she should tell him.

It was to be expected, if there had been any mysterious doings within the prison walls, that the matron's first impulse would be to conceal them, if possible, from an outsider. Official pride would dictate that policy.

On the other hand, if she connected the recent happenings with Winnie Duffy, as her uneasy manner seemed to show, she would naturally see the desirability of confiding in the detective, in the hope that he could clear things up and put a stop to the disorder.

Consequently, she was in a dilemma, but, although he realized that, Nick could not know all that was on her mind. It speaks well for her that she decided to make a clean breast of it.

"I do not know whether Winnie will be able to see you or not, Mr. Carter," she said doubtfully, after a pause.

"Why not? Is there anything the matter with her?"

The matron nodded soberly.

"I do not know how you happened to come here just now, Mr. Carter," she said, "and something tells me I had better not inquire too closely. I have troubles enough as it is. I have been wishing I could talk things over with you, and yet I hadn't made up my mind to approach you. Now that you are here, however, it seems best to put certain facts before you. The superintendent of

prisons has been quite insistent about consulting you, but I will be frank and admit that I have begged for delay, hoping that we could get to the bottom of the matter without outside assistance. Now I am afraid that is out of the question. The girl is in the prison hospital. If she is in a condition to do so, I would prefer to have her tell you the story in her own way, since she seems to think she has the key to the distressing series of occurrences which have given us a great deal of concern lately. If not, I shall tell you what I can."

There was no longer any doubt in Nick's mind that Winnie had been made the victim of a number of attempts against her life. Plainly enough, her letter had not exaggerated the danger which threatened her, yet it was hard to understand how her enemies could have obtained access to her in prison, for prison walls are supposed to guard those behind them as well as those outside.

The matron led the way to the hospital wing, and she left the detective outside of one of the big wards. She returned shortly.

"I am glad to find that the prisoner is better this morning," she announced. "She seems pathetically anxious to see you, and although she is still very weak, I have directed that she be lifted into a wheel chair and taken into a private room, where you can talk without fear of being overheard by the other patients in the ward. I regret to have to advise you, nevertheless, to keep your ears open for eavesdroppers among the attendants. It is a very humiliating confession to make, but, the fact is, I do not know whom to trust any more. Mystery is in the air—and the most sinister sort of mystery at that. Things have happened which I would have believed absolutely impossible. The prison appears to be honeycombed with treachery We have caught some of the miscreants, but I have no real hope that the outrages will cease as a result of anything we heretofore have been able to do. I trust you will not judge us too harshly, Mr. Carter. We have had to work in the dark, for the girl has refused to confide in us, in spite of the fact that she claims to know where to lay the blame. But here she comes!"

As she spoke, Winnie was wheeled out into the corridor. The back of the chair had been let down so that she was lying out at full length. The sleeves of her coarse prison nightgown fell away from her arms, which lay outside of the enveloping blankets, and showed them to be noticeably thin. Her face, too, had lost most of its roundness and beauty, and was very pale.

Her eyes lighted up, however, at sight of the detective, who followed the wheel chair into a small room across the corridor. The matron followed, dismissed the attendant, and then turned to the prisoner.

"This young woman," she said, speaking to Nick, but looking at Winnie, "has had the characteristic convict attitude. In spite of all she has suffered, which we seem to have been powerless to prevent, she has obstinately refused to give us a cue, for to do so would be to aid the prison authorities, whom she looks upon as her natural enemies. Strange to say, though, she seems ready enough to confide in you, who were chiefly instrumental, I believe, in putting her here. I am at a loss to understand such reasoning, but I trust her willingness to see you means that you, at least, are to be given something definite to work on."

This was said dryly, but not unkindly. Before either the detective or Winnie could reply, the matron had left the room and closed the door behind her.

"Well, Winnie, I'm here," Nick remarked, approaching the chair and holding out his hand.

The girl looked surprised, and then one of her hands fluttered weakly to meet the detective's.

"I—I never expected to have you—offer me your hand, Mr. Carter," she said, in a low, halting voice.

"Why not, pray?" Nick asked heartily. "We're all brothers and sisters, after all, and you seem to have been playing in hard luck lately. Why not forget the rest for the moment?"

"I'm certainly willing to—if you are," was the wondering reply. "But to think that I have tried to—to kill you, and——"

"Don't think of it. That's an old, old story with me, child! It's something else I want to hear from you. In the first place, what are you doing in the hospital?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN SCORNED.

"Oh, this is the result of my latest experience," the young woman replied. "But you—didn't they try anything with you, to keep you from coming here?"

"They put a few ties on the track," the detective answered carelessly, "but the train got here in spite of them, you see."

"I am glad. It seems queer to be saying that to you, but it's true. Maybe it's all selfishness on my part, but I don't believe so. Somehow I feel different about you now."

"I'm glad of that, but don't waste your strength. Come to the point, please, if you really mean to tell me anything. What has been going on here?"

"Hasn't the matron told you?"

"Not a thing. She wants you to."

"That's pretty white of her!" the girl murmured, in surprise. "I'm learning a lot of things about people. I won't talk about that any more, though."

She paused, listened, and pointed silently toward the door. Nick understood and crossed to it quickly. As he threw it open, a woman trusty started away in a panic of haste. He was just about to order her to halt, when she was confronted by the matron herself, who unexpectedly appeared on the scene.

"Ah, so you're another of them, are you!" Mrs. Duke exclaimed. "You thought I had gone and the coast was clear, but I caught you in the act. You have been given unusual privileges, but you need not look for any more during your term. Not only that, but we shall see how you like a few days of solitary confinement!"

The disgraced trusty was led away, and Nick returned to the room.

"I had just begun to suspect there was some one out there," he remarked. "I hope now that we shall be left alone."

Winnie Duffy shrugged her thin shoulders.

"You'd think so," she said, "but you can never tell in this place. I wouldn't be surprised at anything now, Mr. Carter. I always used to think the worst would be over if I ever landed in a cell, but it looks to me now as if that's just about the time when things begin to get lively."

"I'm waiting, Winnie. Would you rather tell me first what has happened up here, or who you think is responsible for this persecution?"

The detective drew up a chair and sat down close to the girl, and in such a way that he could study her face in the light. He did not look for anything less than the truth, but he wished to be sure he was getting it.

"I can imagine what you want to hear about most, Mr. Carter," she said, "so we'll begin with that. I wonder, though, if you have any idea of what is to come."

Nick looked at her thoughtfully for a moment, as if to read her purpose. The scrutiny seemed to satisfy him.

"So far as I am able to judge at present," he answered, "it seems to lie between Ned Lyford and his pilot, Jimmy Hare, although it may possibly have been one of Lyford's high-flying friends—high flying in more ways than one."

Winnie looked startled.

"What do you know about that!" she breathed, in amazed admiration. "It doesn't look as if you needed me very much!"

"I do, though," Nick assured her. "Things are at a standstill. We've been able to go just so far and no farther. The plane was Lyford's, of course. There's no doubt about that, and I don't believe there is much room for doubt about your destination that night you tobogganed out of Larchmont jail on a cake of soap; but so far we have been unable to narrow it down any more or to get any real proofs. Sooner or later we could do it without you, and I have no offer to make, but if you have reasons of your own for being willing to come across with some information, I shall be genuinely grateful."

"You needn't be, and I don't expect a thing, Mr. Carter," was the answer. "I couldn't jolly you into thinking I was doing this to help you or the law, and I don't intend to try. I'm doing it for revenge and because I want to stop them from trying to blow me up or poison me or knife me or put a neat little bullet hole through me!"

"So I supposed, but your frankness is none the less refreshing."

"Oh, I've always been frank enough, whenever I dared. Before I say any more, though, I want you to understand, Mr. Carter, that I've never been the 'squealing' kind. If things had been different, you could have made mincemeat out of me without getting me to blab one word about that night, but nobody ever got a worse deal than that man has given me, and it isn't in human nature to stand for it. Yet you know I refused time and again to tell you his name, and it's only since he's been doing his best to finish me here that I've really made up my mind to show him up."

"I understand all that, Winnie."

"Well, then—it was Ned Lyford himself!"

The detective looked at her searchingly for a few moments before he said anything.

"I'm not greatly surprised, on the whole," he declared quietly. "I have found often enough that money and social position do not necessarily keep men straight—or women, either. I thought he wasn't altogether at his ease when he was telling me about finding the damaged biplane and discharging Hare."

Winnie's eyes flashed.

"He actually had the nerve to lay it on Jimmy Hare?" she demanded.

"Of course. Hare served his purpose admirably—for the time being. Don't waste too much sympathy on Jimmy, though. He may not know what Lyford was doing that night, but he must have been paid to disappear and take the blame. At any rate, we haven't been able to find him as yet, and if you hadn't stepped into the breach, it would have been somewhat difficult to prove anything on Lyford until Hare could be found, and, if necessary, tricked into some admission that would have cleared him and implicated his employer. So it was with Lyford that you sought protection the night of your flight from Larchmont?"

The girl's pale face flushed and she lowered her eyes for an instant.

"Yes, it was," she said defiantly. "You can tell George that I said so, if you want to. He'll find it out sooner or later, I suppose, anyway."

"I'm not a talebearer either, Winnie," the detective said quietly. "It's none of my business——"

"Yes, it is, too, worse luck!" the girl interrupted. "You will have to hear the whole thing now if you're going to understand any of it. Wait, though! What is your idea of Lyford? I'd like to see how near you can come to guessing how he happened to be mixed up in this."

"Going to cross-examine me some more, eh? Well, your reference to your husband a moment ago would seem to suggest that Lyford had been your lover. I had thought that there might have been something of that sort between you and the man in the plane, and that you might have persuaded him to aid you as a peculiar sort of lark—dared him to, perhaps. But the things that seem to have been happening to you, as well as those that I ran into on my way up here, have made it plain that the fellow is something more than a rich young adventurer betrayed into criminal enterprises by a pretty face. He's evidently an old hand at the game, and he seems to have a whole army of thugs at his beck and call."

Winnie Duffy's eyes gleamed menacingly, and her expression boded no good to the wealthy clubman.

"I'll be willing to believe all they say about you hereafter," she said. "You've hit the nail on the head, so far, Mr. Carter, but I don't believe that you quite realize, even yet, just how deep Ned Lyford is in the mire, or how far he can reach when he wants to pull somebody else in."

Comprehension came into the detective's intent gaze, and he leaned forward quickly.

"You surely don't mean to say——" he began.

Winnie looked him straight in the eye.

"I mean to say just that," she declared meaningly. "Ned Lyford, with all of his fine houses and his box at the opera, and all that, is the head of the biggest underworld organization that I ever heard of—and I know something about it. The 'Duffy mob,' as you probably call us, was only one of many similar groups under his absolute control."

CHAPTER IX.

A MORE DETAILED CONFESSION.

Nick Carter was silent for some moments as he quickly reviewed the situation in his mind.

"I had realized the possibility of something of that sort being the case," he said presently, in a thoughtful tone, "but I had never really brought myself to believe that

Lyford could have been leading that sort of a double life to such an extent. He certainly must be a wonder! So far as I know, and I have gone into his record pretty thoroughly, no one has ever breathed a word of suspicion in regard to him. He is by no means an impostor, in the sense that the position he occupies does not belong to him by right of birth and breeding, and enough money came to him by inheritance to enable him to enjoy all the luxuries he possesses without causing any one to wonder how he can afford them. But the man himself is his own best recommendation. In spite of what you have told me, and all the reason I have had to suspect him, I find it very hard, even now, to look upon him as the head of a criminal organization of any sort. He seems to be so absolutely at home in the character in which he poses before the world."

"Well, why shouldn't he be?" asked Winnie. "It's his own character—one side of it, anyway. He was born, as you say, with a gold spoon in his mouth; he had the best education that money could buy, and all that high-society stuff is as natural to him as breathing. But there's another side to him, and, believe me, he has lived it to the limit! If I had had a tenth part—or a hundredth, for that matter!—of the reasons Ned Lyford had for keeping straight, there wouldn't have been any outside-the-law stuff for me, and that's just as true of lots of others under his thumb. But Lyford found everything too easy, I guess, and decided that there wasn't any fun in life unless he could break all the laws there are. He's up to the minute in every kind of crime, and you can safely put down most of the unsolved felonies around New York to his credit—or discredit. He has all the books that were ever written, I suppose, about crime and criminals. He brings old methods up to date and invents new ones. It would make your head swim just to hear of the jobs that I know of his having planned and put through, in spite of the fact that he never lets one gang know what any other is doing, if he can help it."

And she proceeded to give a partial list of the crimes committed under Lyford's direction. The newspapers and the conversation of other detectives had made Nick familiar with many of them, but he had not happened to be called upon to solve any of them. The list was an amazing one, and, in some instances, Winnie went into details in a way that convinced the detective that she was telling the truth so far as she went.

She was always careful not to involve any one else, however, by name.

"You must understand, Mr. Carter," she explained, "that nothing could induce me to snitch on any of the others. It isn't their fault that I'm here, and I'm going to play fair with them. Lyford himself is the only one I'm after, and I'll tell you just why. He's always thought he had first mortgages on all the girls under him, if they took his fancy at all, and it didn't matter whether they were married, or had other lovers, or not. And a good many of them haven't minded very much, because he's about as fascinating, in most ways, as a man could be. Their men naturally haven't been tickled to death over it, but Lyford ruled with such a high hand and had it in his power to 'break' them so easily, that they've usually felt obliged to stand for it. He'd been trying to be pretty nice to me for some time, but I managed to keep him just about so far away—more because I was afraid of George, I guess, than anything else. Anyway, it hadn't come to a show-down when you got George and the rest of us there at Baycove and at Larchmont.

"Then I saw a chance to sneak out of that dinky little jail, and I took it. Maybe I ought to have tried to get George out, too, but he was shot up more or less, and not much use in a get-away, even if I could have pried him out of the place. When I was on the outside, looking in, and had got into my clothes again, I couldn't think of any place to go except to Ned's. I knew what I was letting myself in for. George isn't like the rest of Lyford's 'officers,' as he calls them, and I saw my finish when he got loose and found, if he ever did, that I had gone to Ned of my own free will. I didn't seem to care that night, though, and I was ready for anything if it would help me to get even with you and show you that you hadn't made quite so complete a clean-up as you thought."

"I haven't much use for that sort of an excuse, Winnie," the detective said severely.

"I'm not offering it as an excuse," was the reply. "I don't care—very much—what you think of me. I'm simply telling you how I felt about things then. The long and short of it is that I went. Lyford happened to be home and—seemed to be glad to see me. To make a long story short, I succeeded in persuading him to help me personally in pulling off some more jobs, that would open your eyes and give you trouble."

"You'll realize how much of a triumph that was for me, at the time, when I tell you that he had never before taken a direct hand in any of the long list of crimes that had been put through by the various groups or individuals under him. I put it up to him in this way, though: I pointed out that you had broken up the 'Sound mob'—that was George's—and had taken possession of our boat. If a few other jobs of the sort we have been doing could be pulled off at once, however, apparently by the same means, they would certainly get your goat. The *Robin Hood* was lost to us, and none of the other gangs had been doing water work. Besides, if we tried to get another boat that was anywhere near as good as ours, you would probably be on to it in a hurry. That was why I urged him to strain a point and take me in his plane to some place on the Sound where I could give you something to think about.

"He hemmed and hawed a lot at first, but I played him as skillfully as I knew how—and finally landed him. The next night we did that little 'Overlook' stunt at Port Washington, and I, thinking I was just about 'it,' scratched a 'defi' to you on the windowpane I had cut out. The next day I was fool enough to send you word that I was going to get busy at Long Beach the following night. I supposed you would come to the place I named, and that my men—Ned had let me have my brother and two from another gang—could rob the bank in peace while you and your assistants were kicking your heels at the Laidlaw cottage. But you played all around me and guarded the bank and about everything else in the whole place.

"I didn't go near the bank myself, so I was able to give you the slip, and the fact that those fool police left the Baker house unprotected during the siege of the bank gave me my chance to break in there. Ned picked me up from the lawn in his flying boat, and we circled around away up in the air and thought we were having a good laugh on you, after all. But when we saw through the

glasses that you had guessed what my get-away meant, Ned Lyford was scared for once. He knew how you had traced the power boat and he was afraid you would get him in the same way. So he decided to risk an attempt to blow you all up. He had some aërial bombs with him—had carried them the night before, too, in case of trouble—and we thought we could easily get you and your men when you left in the car. But we failed at that, as you know. It was failure all along the line—a losing game from the moment you got into it. One of your bullets got me just as I dropped the second bomb, and I toppled over inside the underbody. That's all I knew until I came to after you had pulled me out of the water."

"Did you suspect at once what had happened?" asked Nick.

"No, I didn't. It was only when I grew a little stronger and had gone over the affair again and again that I began to see that Lyford must have deliberately dumped me over the side. I simply couldn't believe it for a while, for I thought I had made myself solid with him, but I saw there wasn't any other explanation that was worth a darn. You told me while I was in jail, you remember, that he had had a good deal of difficulty in getting the plane to go up out of range. He must have been about beside himself, and I suppose, manlike, he laid all the blame on me. He probably thought he could have finished the lot of you if he had been able to drop the bombs, and, of course, if it hadn't been for me, he wouldn't have been in it at all. Then there was the question of lightening the plane. Altogether, it evidently looked to him as if the best thing he could do was to throw me to the dogs. You can imagine how sore I was about it, but I always intended to have it out with him some day. I never thought of giving him away to you or anybody until he began sending me threats, and then followed them up with these attempts to croak me."

"You haven't told me about them," the detective reminded her.

"Well, he seems to have been able to get all sorts of people, right in the prison, here, to do his dirty work for him. First, one of the other prisoners tried to knife me while we were in the yard, during exercise hour. I saw the thing coming—it was a sharpened file—and we had a sweet scrap until they pried us apart. The woman is pretending to be crazy now, but she isn't any crazier than you are. Then came the explosion. It was a peach, but whoever did the job didn't time it very well, or else something went wrong. My old cell couldn't be found afterward, and the whole wing got an awful jolt—have you seen it?—but most of us had just left it at the time. Those who hadn't, got it good and plenty, believe me! And if I had had any doubt about it, Lyford took pains to remove it by sending me word through one of the keepers that the fireworks had been meant for me, and that he would 'get' me next time. But he didn't, you see. He put me in the hospital with some poisoned fruit, but they succeeded in pumping me out before it was too late."

"Poisoned fruit?"

"Yes. A sweet old lady came around here with a lot of fine fruit and asked permission to give it to us. She told such a straight story and seemed to have set her heart on passing out the stuff to us in person that they finally fell for it. They examined the fruit, of course, and found no tools or notes concealed anywhere, but that was all. Nobody else had any trouble, but fifteen minutes after I ate part of it, I was tied up in a double knot. By that time the old lady was gone, and they've never seen anything of her since. She had my fruit doctored, all right, and the whole stunt was stage-managed just for that. She was disguised, of course—maybe she was Ned himself. Anyway, she was a bird!"

"Isn't any one under suspicion in connection with the explosion?"

"Two or three, I believe, but they haven't been able to get anything on them yet."

The girl's story was an amazing one in every way, and she supplemented it by giving many facts in regard to Ned Lyford's habits and haunts, which promised to be of considerable assistance to the detective.

She was full of dread over the thought that Lyford would "get" her yet, but Nick promised to do all in his power to have her protected.

Their talk of more than an hour had tired her greatly, and Nick left her.

CHAPTER X.

A GET-AWAY WITH FANCY TRIMMINGS.

Mrs. Duke, when she had heard as much as the detective thought best to tell her, agreed to give the girl a private room in the hospital wing and put her in the exclusive charge of a couple of nurses whom she could absolutely trust.

Winnie's food was to be cooked especially for her, the hospital was to be guarded night and day, and, in fact, every precaution that Nick could suggest was to be taken.

In return, the detective agreed not only to stop, as soon as possible, all bribing or other methods of influencing the staff and prisoners, from outside, but also to do his best to run down those who had already taken part in the attempts against the Duffy woman.

Nick realized that there was probably a lot of hard work cut out for him. He did not look for much trouble after he had once put Ned Lyford behind the bars, for he intended to see that Lyford did not have a chance to direct the organization from inside, and he felt sure that it would not be very dangerous when it found itself headless.

But it did not promise to be easy to catch Lyford now, since he must know—or soon would, at any rate—that the detective had seen Winnie. The clubman would have the best of reasons for being sure that the girl he had treated so shabbily had betrayed him to the detective, and he would doubtless be on his guard, with all the far-reaching organization at his command behind him to shield him and continue its attempts to put Nick and his assistants out of business for all time.

Before he had left New York, Nick had arranged with his various assistants to keep control of matters there, so far as possible. The search for Jimmy Hare was to go on, Lyford's most intimate friends—those, at least, who could pilot an aëroplane—were to be investigated thoroughly, and, finally, the clubman himself was to be shadowed.

Now that the detective knew the whole extent of Lyford's criminal activities, however, he had little hope that his assistants had been entirely successful in carrying out

his instructions in the latter respect. They might think they knew all about the gentlemanly rascal's doings of the last couple of days, but Nick was fairly certain they did not.

Lyford had, most likely, remained right in New York, in his usual exclusive haunts, and directed affairs through one or more subordinates, whose goings and comings were as little calculated to excite suspicion as his own, but that did not indicate an easy finish, by any means.

The detective decided to remain at the prison until he could get the latest news from New York, and then decide what to do. He secured Mrs. Duke's consent to that rather unusual arrangement, and without much trouble. She felt it a protection to have him there, and, since the prison had already been the scene of repeated attempts at violence, the greater risk, if any, involved in his presence, did not appear to matter greatly. On the other hand, Nick knew that he would not be very welcome at the hotel, in view of all that had happened the night before, and he felt sure that wherever he went now, he would carry even more danger than before.

Accordingly he sent to the hotel for any letters, telegrams, and other messages which might have come in his absence.

The messenger brought back a detailed report from Chick, which had been written late the night before and sent by mail. According to this report, Jimmy Hare had at last been located in Philadelphia, and locked up. He had, of course, denied all knowledge of the manner in which the flying boat had been injured, but had obstinately refused to account for his whereabouts on the night in question.

Nick was not interested in Hare any more, and he skipped over to Chick's description of the watch which had been kept over Lyford. As he expected, Ned had not betrayed himself in any way. Apparently he had been leading the perfectly normal life of a man of his means and position. He had gone on no suspicious errands and had not been seen with any one whose appearance was questionable to the slightest degree.

Yet there was no doubt, that, during that very period, he had been actively directing, at a distance, the repeated attempts of his agents to bring Nick's mission to Auburn to a sudden halt. Plainly, it was no ordinary scoundrel with whom they had to deal.

The detective was in a quandary.

He did not care to have his most trusted assistants head a raiding party in New York without him, and yet he feared that, despite their best efforts, Lyford would manage somehow to slip through their fingers before he could get there to take command in person.

What was to be done?

He could answer that better after he had called up his house on the long-distance phone and learned what change, if any, had taken place since Lyford had received that morning's bad news from the prison town.

None of his assistants was at the Madison Avenue house when he called up, and he was obliged to leave word with Joseph, his butler, to have Chick or Patsy call him later.

It was nearly noon before he was summoned to the phone in the prison office. Patsy was on the wire, and he became greatly excited when his chief briefly told him of Winnie's revelations.

"Gee, but I wish we had known that an hour ago!" he lamented.

"Why?"

"Why, the fellow is out of our reach, and you can bet he won't come back if he can help it!"

"Out of your reach? How?"

"Up in the air. He had his flying boat wheeled out of his private hangar up at Rye, not much more than an hour ago, and announced that he was going to do something that had never been done before. Did you know that he is scheduled to take part in one of the aëroplane races at Mineola to-morrow?"

"Yes, Chick so reported."

"Well, he had sent for a lot of reporters, and there was quite a bunch of people on hand this morning. He must have got word from Auburn, and it looks to me as if it was all a put-up job. Anyway, he made a little speech—I was there, not as little Patsy Garvan, of course, and heard it. He said that he was going to do a brand-new stunt—take the air twenty-four hours before the race, at a point many miles away from the aviation grounds, and stay up until the race. His barograph was to be the proof of whether he had done so or not, and he declared it his intention, if possible, not to touch the earth again until after he had won to-morrow's race. He gave us a lot of hot air about the value of the feat from the standpoint of aviation and human endurance, and all that sort of thing, but I don't believe now that he ever meant to try anything of the sort, do you?"

"It looks like a new sort of get-away, with fancy trimmings," admitted Nick. "It would be just like him to conceal his intention in some such elaborate way, and keep everybody guessing to the last. Whatever he may be up to, though, we must get our hands on him as soon as possible. I wish I were down there, but, on the other hand, I don't like to leave the prison unprotected. He may appear here before the day is over, for all I know, and make a last desperate attempt, in person, to pay Winnie up for her betrayal. My place is down there, however, and I'll have to come. He can't get here for hours yet, even if he flies all the way, which he isn't likely to do. I'll put the whole thing up to the police and the prison authorities here, and see that every safeguard possible is thrown about the place. Then I'll jump on a special train for New York and join you as soon as steam will bring me. Meanwhile, get Chick, take up the whole thing with the police, and see that they send the alarm all over the surrounding country, giving a description of Lyford and his plane. Don't leave his houses or other haunts unguarded, though, because he may double back in disguise. He must be caught—that's all there is about it. Do everything you can think of, but keep in touch with the house, for I may want to telegraph further instructions while I'm on the way. Get the idea?"

"Right between the eyes, chief. Watch my smoke!"

Nick Carter did not stop to do any thinking after he had hung up the receiver. He immediately called up the railroad station and made arrangements for his special to be ready in half an hour. Then he rapidly outlined his plans to the matron and called up the local chief of police to secure additional protection for the prison.

There was no time to bother with Lyford's agents in Auburn. If they let him get out of town he was willing to let them alone for the present. There would be plenty

of opportunity to attend to them when the head of the organization had been disposed of.

His bodyguard of two accompanied the detective to the station, but no further interference was attempted. The scene of action seemed to have suddenly shifted.

His special was ready on time, and soon Nick was steaming toward New York at a speed that swallowed the miles whole.

CHAPTER XI.

EXTRAORDINARY DARING.

The next day was a holiday, and, consequently, there was a big crowd at the famous aviation grounds at Mineola, Long Island.

The aëroplane races had been extensively advertised for weeks, but it was safe to say that thousands of those on hand had been drawn there principally by the sensational exposures in regard to Ned Lyford, the best-known amateur entered, and the possibility that he would make good his promise to take part in one of the morning's races.

For the clubman had not been arrested. In fact, so far as any one in New York knew, he had never been seen since his flying boat had dwindled to nothing in the sky the morning before.

Nick Carter had arrived in New York the previous night, after a phenomenal run from Auburn, and had found that his assistants had done, with the ready co-operation of the police, all that could be accomplished under the circumstances.

Every likely place that was known to them, both in the city itself and up at Rye, had been under constant observation. Warnings had been sown broadcast all over that section of the country, and the newspapers had spread the news far and wide.

Lyford's amazing double life and extraordinary disappearance suddenly became the chief topic of conversation in half a dozen States, and about the only topic that was discussed in New York.

As time went on without bringing any word of him, people had begun to wonder if, after all, he might not be daring enough to make good his promise and take part in the race. There was nothing theoretically impossible about the feat he had attempted. Perhaps he had succeeded in staying in the air all that time, if his biplane had been specially equipped when it was repaired.

As for the danger of arrest should he appear at Mineola, the public reasoned that he would know he was safe enough so long as he could remain out of reach of the police and detectives. What was there to prevent him from actually taking part in the race for which his flying boat was entered, and then, barring accidents, why couldn't he fly away again with a grin and a derisive wave of the hand?

The possibility of such a spectacular defiance had taken possession of the public mind, and it had been set forth in eloquent terms in more than one of the morning papers. As a result, the attendance at the aërial meet was a record-breaking one and included a small army of reporters, news photographers, and moving-picture men.

Usually Nick Carter and his assistants would have laughed at such expectations, but in this particular case they were not inclined to do so.

They knew enough of Ned Lyford to feel that he was capable of almost anything if he once made up his mind to tempt fate. He was an exceptionally skillful and daring aviator, and, knowing, as he must, that his former manner of life would be impossible from now on, he might be reckless enough to risk everything that was left to him in one final grand-stand play.

To be sure, he had shown something like a yellow streak the night he had thrown Winnie Duffy from the plane, but that was probably due to a more-or-less temporary fit of temper over the scrape into which she had tempted him, and his merciless hounding of her since then had been made necessary by her recovery and his fear of ruin at her hands. The man's temperament was essentially a dare-devil one, and certainly the present situation was of a sort to bring all of his audacity to the surface.

The detectives had, therefore, decided to go to Mineola, prepared for any emergency. They were present now, and they had made certain arrangements which promised to be a surprise to Ned Lyford in case he should put in an appearance.

The meet was already in progress, there being one or two short, minor events before the race for amateur owners operating their own planes, which was scheduled for half past ten.

As that hour drew near and the air was emptied of other craft, in readiness for the principal event of the morning, the excitement grew intense and thousands of eyes searched the heavens in every direction, on the lookout for Lyford's famous flying boat, the *Corsair*.

Soon there was a great stir in one part of the extensive grounds, and a man was seen to leap up and point wildly in the direction of the Sound.

The contagion spread. Necks were craned and eyes were strained all over the field.

Nick, Chick, and Patsy, the sheriff of the county, and a number of constables, were over by the hangars. The former whipped out a pair of powerful field glasses and focused them on the section of sky indicated. The glasses swept the blue expanse, here and there, for a few moments, then came to rest.

"What is it? Is it Lyford?" demanded Chick, while the others crowded about expectantly.

The detective did not reply at once.

"It certainly is," he answered presently, after a long, careful scrutiny of the approaching plane. "At least," he added, "it's his craft."

The feelings of those gathered about the detective may be imagined. They were practically certain that the wildly improbable was about to become a fact, whereas the tumult among the masses of people in the public stands and inclosures was based largely on mere readiness to believe that they were about to witness a sensational scene.

As the flying boat sped nearer, and its character was more fully revealed to the naked eye, one of the officials of the meet hurried over to the detective.

"It's the *Corsair*, as sure as guns!" he exclaimed. "What shall we do? The officers of the Aëro Club met last night and disqualified Lyford."

"Then his presence or absence is immaterial, so far as the official records of the race are concerned," Nick answered promptly. "Let him go ahead and cover the course with the rest, if he wants to. It won't affect the result, even if he outdistances the qualified entrants.

And if you do anything to spoil the crowd's fun, you'll have a riot on your hands."

"I'm afraid you're right there, but——"

"Don't worry. We can take care of him just as well after the race as before, and it will be better in every way to let it go on. Don't give him any inkling, if you can help it, that he is disqualified, or that anybody is here to arrest him. If he has really stayed in the air all night, or hidden in some out-of-the-way place, he probably does not know how far things have gone in his absence. It's just as well he shouldn't, until the time comes for a show-down."

The official agreed to Nick's suggestions, and nervously took his departure.

Lyford's biplane had been traveling at a height of at least a thousand feet. Now, as the four other contestants prepared to take the air, it sailed down in a long, graceful sweep, and began to circle about, waiting for the others to rise.

The thousands of spectators were on their feet, waving hats, handkerchiefs, canes, and what not. The man, criminal though he was, had captured the throng for the time being by his amazing exhibition of daring defiance, and a roar of welcome and unreasoning admiration went up to him.

The man's face was almost totally obscured by his leather aviators' helmet and his goggles, but he responded to the popular greeting by bowing and waving one gauntleted hand.

It is doubtful if any other aërial race ever gave so many thrills or caused so much tense, breathless interest as did the one which followed. It defied adequate description. The thousands present—men, women, and children—were alternately rooted to their places and carried hither and thither as if moved by giant, invisible hands.

It was an experience which none of them was likely to forget. The unparalleled nature of the situation and the supreme effrontery of the chief figure in the proceedings were enough to make the occasion memorable, but added to these was the tantalizing uncertainty as to the outcome.

The people were not in the secret. They saw the other contestants rise from the field near the hangars, one after another, and maneuver for the start. They saw Lyford's flying boat skillfully aligned with the rest, as if his participation was being taken as a matter of course—yet many of them had read in the papers of the action of the Aëro Club in disqualifying him. What did it mean? Was anything going to be done to arrest him? They did not know what could be done, but, despite their frenzied greeting of a few minutes before, they would feel cheated if the man were tamely allowed to flit away again. They admired his recklessness to the full, but they wanted to see him brought to time somehow before their eyes, sooner or later. That would be the crowning moment of all.

The signal was given and the race started. In itself, and without Lyford, it would have been a milk-and-water affair in this day of looping the loop and all sorts of hair-raising feats by professional aviators, for it consisted only of a series of headlong flights around an oval course, indicated by a succession of lofty white pillars, or pylons.

In other words, it was a sort of chariot race in the air. Speed and good judgment in turning the corners and hugging the pylons as closely as safety would permit were the chief elements of success, and no fancywork was possible. There was danger, of course. A couple of the planes might collide, or one of them might venture too near one of the pillars during a turn, strike it with an inner wing, and he dashed to the ground.

Nothing of the sort happened, however, and it soon became evident that Lyford completely outclassed his opponents. In spite of the unusual test his motor had been given—or, perhaps, because of it—his speed was much greater than that of any of the others. Either their engines were inferior, or else they did not dare drive them at such tremendous speed over a course of that character, with a turn every half minute or so.

But the fugitive drove like a demon, and again and again cries of apprehension rose as he shaved the pylons so close that it seemed impossible for him to escape a spill.

The others kept pegging away, nevertheless, knowing that Lyford's performance would not be officially recognized. The clubman actually lapped them all once during the race, to the delight of the frantic throng, and yet was able to finish far in the lead.

As the signal sounded the conclusion of the strange race, the *Corsair* veered aside, its pilot waved his hand once more, this time in open derision. A moment later the flying boat began to spiral upward.

But the open-mouthed spectators, whose attention had been riveted on Lyford's doings, to the exclusion of all else, suddenly realized that another air craft, a big, bird-like monoplane, had risen from the ground in front of one of the hangars, and was darting toward the departing biplane.

Forty thousand eyes saw the two figures strapped to the seats of the monoplane, but few knew that one of them was Nick Carter.

CHAPTER XII.

A MASTER RASCAL'S LAST DEFIANCE.

The detective had made all of his arrangements long before the *Corsair* had been sighted. He did not then know, of course, that Ned Lyford would undertake to carry out his staggering program, but he was inclined to think he might, and, since no other clew had presented itself, Nick had determined to concentrate his attention on the aviation meet that morning.

If he should get any word that necessitated a change of plans, well and good, but, if not, he meant to remain at Mineola, ready for instant action, until that race was over.

He had easily secured the services of one of the most reckless of the young professional aviators who made their headquarters at the grounds. This man, Tom Hapgood, had no nerves, and he did not know what it was to be afraid. He was noted for his daring feats in the air, in which he rivaled Pegoud himself, and his command of the record-breaking monoplane which he drove for the Crandall Company was phenomenal. He refused the generous offer which Nick made him and insisted upon taking the detective up "just for the fun of it." Nick finally agreed, although, of course, he made himself liable for any damages which the machine might sustain.

Under cover of the excitement occasioned by the race, the monoplane—Hapgood called it the *Wasp*—had been wheeled out of its shed and tuned up. As the race drew

To a close, Nick had taken his place in the passenger's seat, the powerful motor had been started, and the monoplane had risen without attracting any attention beyond the various small groups in the neighborhood of the hangars.

Now, however, all eyes were upon it, and the fickle crowd, guessing what this unheralded ascent meant, immediately transferred its sympathies from the pursued to the pursuers.

"That must be Nick Carter!" and "That's Nick Carter, they say!" were some of the exclamations that ran from lip to lip. And many added, with conviction: "Nobody else would dare to go up after the fellow."

Lyford evidently saw what he was in for. The *Corsair* abruptly stopped its climb and shot away at top speed in the direction whence it had come.

But the *Wasp* cut a corner and was after it with a speed as great, if not greater, than that of the craft which had just made all of its immediate rivals ridiculous. It was professional against amateur now, and Tom Hapgood's mastery began to manifest itself at once.

The crowd was keenly disappointed to see the two planes hurtling directly away from the field, but Nick would not have had it otherwise. He did not care to have the closing scene, whatever it might be, take place in sight of all those thousands. That would have been a far more theatrical finish than his modesty would have welcomed.

Besides, the end promised to be a more or less violent one. Nothing else, in fact, seemed likely, and the detective did not wish to furnish any demoralizing spectacle for the morbid passions of the multitude.

Lyford had shown up his nonprofessional opponents to his heart's content, but now the tables had been turned, and he was destined to find himself as completely outclassed by grinning little Tom Hapgood as he had so recently outclassed the others.

The trimly built *Wasp* was lighter, and it offered much less resistance to the air. It drove forward almost with the speed of a projectile, and the distance between it and the flying boat decreased moment by moment.

Lyford kept a straight course toward the Sound. The *Corsair* responded nobly to his desperate efforts to get the utmost possible speed out of the overworked motor, but the *Wasp* was faster and in more skilled hands. The fugitive kept looking back in a hunted fashion, and each time he looked, his pursuers loomed nearer.

It must have been a heart-breaking experience for the proud, arrogant criminal, who was so used to easy conquests of all sorts in high and low society alike. He was alone now, thanks to his own choice, with none of his underworld minions to help him. It was plane against plane, man against man—and he was losing! There could be no doubt about that.

He could not shake off his pursuers, or even keep out of their reach, and if he tried to make a landing he would be pounced upon at once.

Could he force a collision with the monoplane, in the hope of disabling it without serious injury to his own craft? Hardly, for the *Wasp* could be maneuvered much more easily than the flying boat.

His only hope lay in his revolver. With one hand on the steering wheel and the other over his shoulder, clutching the weapon, he opened fire.

His attention, however, was divided, the target was an uncertain one, and altogether the conditions were far from right for effective marksmanship. Shot after shot went wild, without striking either Nick or the aviator, or doing any damage to the monoplane.

The detective made no attempt to respond to the shots. When Lyford's ammunition was exhausted, as it soon was, Carter shouted to his pilot to increase his speed, if possible. Hapgood did it, much to Nick's surprise, for it had seemed that their whirlwind pace could not be bettered.

The clubman's desperate plight was telling on him now. The *Corsair* showed, by its behavior, that a nervous, hard-pressed man was in control—or, rather, in danger of losing it.

Relentlessly the *Wasp* drew near and forged alongside. The unarmed fugitive was at Nick's mercy now, and the lips beneath the glaring goggles were drawn back from the teeth in the snarl of a trapped animal.

But the detective knew that even if he merely disabled Lyford with a shot, it would mean complete loss of control, followed by a fatal lunge toward the earth, five hundred feet below. The mad race could not go on forever, of course, but he could at least give the gentleman rascal an opportunity to surrender and descend safely.

He covered Lyford with his automatic, and, cupping the other hand as well as he could, raised his voice above the din of the two motors and the mighty whirring of the propellers.

"Will you give up?" he demanded. "You can't escape."

"I'll see you down below first!" the hoarse response came back faintly. "And you'll never take me alive!"

"This is your last chance," Nick told him sternly.

Lyford shrugged his broad shoulders and did not take the trouble to answer. Instead, he deliberately threw his plane around at an angle that would bring it in collision with the *Wasp* in a few seconds.

Hapgood, however, was attending to business. He had been expecting some such move, and swerved almost as soon as Lyford did. The danger was averted for the time being, but Nick saw that the strange struggle in the air could not go on. Aside from the question of his own safety, he had no right to risk Hapgood's life needlessly.

They were over the Sound now, and already a mile or two from shore. If he could disable the *Corsair* with a shot, Lyford ought to be able to descend safely to the surface of the water, and the boat body would keep him afloat.

To be sure, Hapgood could not follow his example, for the monoplane was not a water bird; but, if necessary, the *Wasp* could swoop down close to the water and Nick could dive. If he were in the water and Lyford afloat in the flying boat, the latter would naturally have the advantage, but the detective felt confident that he could handle him and get him to shore, or wait until the aviator could find a boat to take them on board.

On the other hand, Nick's shot might do more harm than he intended. The biplane might become unmanagable and fall headlong. That risk, however, must be run. Lyford was a hardened criminal, a desperate fugitive from justice, who was certainly not entitled to any sentimental consideration, especially at the risk of other and more valuable lives. Besides, he had received sufficient warning.

Reluctantly the great detective raised his weapon and took aim at the motor.

Lyford saw the gesture and knew what it meant. Before Nick had time to fire, the front of the flying boat sank in instant response to a hurried manipulation on the part of the fugitive, and the big craft began, head down, a sickening dive toward the water.

"Good heavens! He's done it now!" ejaculated the detective, and Hapgood, although he could not hear the words, nodded his head solemnly.

It was true. Rather than submit to capture, Lyford had ended it all with one last, characteristic defiance. The full power of his motor drove the *Corsair* under the waves until even the huge upper plane was nearly submerged.

The body, entangled in the wreckage, was recovered a couple of hours later, and Nick returned to New York in a very quiet mood.

The case was brought to a speedy conclusion after that. An immense quantity of stolen goods, the fruit of years of remarkably bold and successful crimes, was recovered, and Lyford's relatives refused to touch a penny of his fortune—it proved to be represented by seven figures—because they had no means of ascertaining how much of the money was "clean" and how much "dirty." Since it was impossible, however, except in a comparatively few cases, to prove that the dead man had profited by particular robberies, most of the money was given to charity, Nick Carter being made one of the trustees.

The detective respected Winnie Duffy's refusal to betray any of her other fellow criminals and did not urge a further confession upon her. The master brain of the great criminal conspiracy would plot no more, and the lesser brains which had been under its sway were not likely to be any more dangerous now than the average.

But Nick lost no time in getting to the bottom of affairs at Auburn and seeing that those who had repeatedly attempted to take his life and that of the girl were given the punishment they deserved.

It was not very exciting work compared with that aërial dash from Mineola to the Sound, but thoroughness demanded it, and Nick Carter was nothing if not thorough.

And he preferred to work quietly, without any blare of trumpets or noise of applauding thousands. No one was ever in the public eye more than he, and no one ever relished publicity less. He was not a "good advertiser," but, as in this instance, he always "delivered the goods."

THE END.

"The Red Plague; or, Nick Carter and the Fire Fiends," which is the title of the story that you will find in the next issue of this weekly, No. 109, out October 10th, tells how the great detective and his assistants check the dastardly work of a band of firebugs.

CRUEL HUNTING.

Wolf-skin rugs are obtained by so cruel a process that the knowledge of it should destroy their beauty for sensitive souls. The Eskimo hunter puts a piece of fat on a sharpened flint and fastens it to a wooden stake planted in the ground. In licking off the fat, the wolf cuts his tongue, and, maddened by the taste of the blood, continues to lick the sharp stone. Other wolves, attracted by the smell of blood, gather round and struggle for a place near the flint. In their fury they turn upon each other, and the end of the fight is like the historic tragedy of the Kilkenny cats—there are no survivors. All the hunter has to do is to remove the skins and rebait his savage trap.

Adventure in the Petticoat Maze.

By J. KENILWORTH EGERTON.

(This interesting story was commenced in No. 106 of NICK CARTER STORIES. Back numbers can always be obtained from your news dealer or the publishers.)

CHAPTER VI.

The Duke of Rimnek would have attracted attention in any gathering, for a more distinguished-looking man it has never been my lot to see. The snow-white hair, the telltale wrinkles in front of the ears, and the crow's-feet about the corners of the eyes spoke unmistakably of advanced age; but the eyes themselves, clear, black as night, and as piercing as gimlets; the clear, fresh complexion; the erect carriage; the small waist and elastic step proclaimed as strongly that he retained the physical vigor of youth. In appearance and manner he was *grand seigneur;* but when he spoke he was the man of affairs, accustomed to receiving concise answers to curt questions.

"Mr. Williams, in a morning paper I have read that you have in your possession a most remarkable medallion," he said, after briefly introducing himself. "May I ask if that statement is correct?"

"It is," replied Tommy laconically, and a gleam of satisfaction came to our visitor's dark eyes.

"Will you please show it to me?" he said, the words expressing a request, his manner almost a peremptory command; and, to my great surprise, Tommy shook his head in emphatic negative.

"I am responsible for the safety of the medallion, and it is not on public view," he said, his tone plainly indicating his resentment of the other's imperiousness. "I am not at liberty to show it without permission from its owner, Mr. Ridgway, whom you probably know."

"I have not that honor; but I think that we may take it for granted that the presentation of my card by my secretary would be all that is necessary," answered the duke impatiently.

"To be quite frank with you, I don't believe that it would," said Tommy quietly. "I believe that Mr. Ridgway would first make inquiries—for instance; he might ask if you were ever known by the title and name of 'Count Ladislas.'" The white eyebrows were elevated just a trifle, and there was a look of inquiry in the eyes beneath them.

"Most certainly I have been; it is one of my minor titles which I invariably use when I am on my Hungarian estate, from which it is derived," he answered.

"And he might further inquire if you lived on that estate until about four years ago, assuming charge of the education of a young woman who was known as the Countess Nelka," continued Tommy imperturbably; and the duke apparently found it no easy matter to maintain his self-control.

"Mr. Williams, there is no use beating about the bush," he said quickly. "I am Nicholas Lobenski, Duke of Rimnek, in Transylvania, Count Ladislas, of Panonia, in Hungary, and possessed of other titles, the naming of which would probably not interest you. In voluntarily giving you information, I do not admit your right to demand it, any more than I admit the right of ownership in the medallion by Mr. Ridgway. In reality it is one of the crown jewels of Transylvania."

"In that case, I should say that its rightful owner was at this moment the czar, who seems to own the country," answered Tommy. "If I had been entirely certain of that, I might have delivered it to his representative, Prince Lubetskoi, who anticipated your demand by an hour."

For a moment the mask dropped from our visitor's face, and what it had hidden was not pleasant to look at.

"Mr. Williams, if you are attempting to play with me, you will find it an unprofitable game," he said in a voice which trembled with passion. "There is much that you cannot understand; but you are entering troubled waters."

"Your grace, there are one or two things which you do not appreciate, also," answered Tommy coolly. "First of all, you are neither in Transylvania nor a remote village in Hungary, and you are not dealing with a peasant or a Tzigane. You are in Paris, where your power is just as much or as little as your personal influence can command, and negotiating with an American who isn't in the slightest degree awed by your rank. I don't intend to risk my life and liberty by mixing up in European politics and intrigues, but for the moment I am in a position where I can make it very unpleasant for new acquaintances of mine who are skating on very thin ice."

"Do you believe the possession of a trinket gives you such great power?" asked the duke sarcastically.

"Knowing something of its history, I don't underestimate its value," answered Tommy. "If I were in doubt about it, the fact that a simple notice in the paper brings you, almost treading on the heels of Prince Lubetskoi, to obtain it from me would make me suspicious that it was of importance."

"Possibly that coincidence leads you to believe that it is more valuable than the result would prove," answered the duke in a tone which he attempted to make indifferent, and Tommy looked at him sharply.

"Shall I tell you just how valuable it is?" he asked.

"If you will be so kind."

"I am repeating only what you already know—even so little a thing as an empty promise to return it was worth, shall we say, a duke's ransom?" He kept his eyes fixed on the face of the man in front of him, and it seemed to me that the duke did not find it altogether easy to maintain the half-insolent stare with which he returned that gaze when Tommy went on. "Siberia is a desolate place, and the dungeons of St. Peter and Paul even worse, my dear duke. A man would promise much to escape from either."

The duke shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "A promise extorted under duress is not always binding."

Tommy looked at him contemptuously. "I should hesitate to negotiate with any one whom I thought capable of pleading the baby-act."

The Duke of Rimnek smiled again. "My dear sir, for a cause much is permissible which would be dishonorable to gain a private end. Suppose that we admit the truth of your insinuation; do you think that I was actuated solely by my desire for liberty in making that promise?"

"Being a Yankee, I shall answer your question by asking one," said Tommy. "Does a 'cause' make it permissible to entice away the wife of another man?"

"It would make it allowable to deliver a message from a suffering and oppressed people, by the man who had devoted his life to making a woman fit to rescue them," was the duke's proud retort. "There are some things which an American cannot understand, Mr. Williams."

"And which he does not care to," added Tommy dryly. "Now I shall tell you just where we stand. You, or your agents, have enticed Mrs. Ridgway from a happy home on the plea that it is her duty to return to a people who haven't the courage to fight for themselves. The only possible chance of success is to work on the superstitious fears of a feeble-minded autocrat, and to do that the possession of this medallion—to which he attributes almost supernatural powers—is absolutely necessary. When it was entrusted to her she was impressed with the belief that it did in fact possess great power as an amulet; so that she followed her maternal instinct and tried to cast its protection over the child whom she deserted. No blow has been struck for the liberty of Transylvania, for her advisers know that it would be hopeless without the influence of the amulet on the czar. I believe that you will admit that my statement is correct."

"I admit that until we obtain the medallion the difficulties will be greater," answered the duke slowly.

"And I will tell you frankly that the only way you will ever get that medallion is to bring Mrs. Ridgway to this studio to demand it," said Tommy positively.

For a moment the duke looked at him as if he were mentally estimating the chance of success in physical attack, and then he laughed contemptuously.

"The Princess Stephanie will hardly condescend to that. It is apparent that the Americans do not honor rank."

"I was speaking of Mrs. Ridgway, who—since the wife takes the nationality of her husband—is an American woman," replied Tommy quietly, but I appreciated that the Duke of Rimnek was narrowly skirting trouble.

"A morganatic marriage is of small consequence," said the duke, as he rose from his seat. "I can assure you that you are carried away by an undue sense of your own importance, and that you are interfering in affairs which are above you. I have the honor to wish you good day."

Tommy walked to the door and placed his back against it.

"Stop, sir. You came here uninvited, but now you shall wait until you have heard me out. For your own safety I don't care a hang, but for the happiness of my friend Mr. Ridgway I care much—so much that I wish to see it restored and not shattered by the knowledge that his wife is in a living tomb in Siberia. I warn you that unless you give me the opportunity to have five minutes' talk with her, you will find me no mean opponent to your schemes, and you will never lay hands on the medallion."

"There is no necessity for melodrama." And the duke motioned for him to stand away from the door. "All of my life I have lived in the midst of danger, so I am not to be frightened by idle threats. I fear that we cannot serve each other, Mr. Williams."

Tommy hesitated for a minute, and then stood away from the door.

"You know that I am handicapped by fear of harming Mrs. Ridgway—a consideration which probably does not influence your plans—but there is an old proverb which avers that there are more ways of killing a cat than choking it to death with cream."

The duke smiled sarcastically; but had he known Mr. Thomas Williams as well as I did, the answering grin on that gentleman's face would have given him cause for uneasiness. He bowed ceremoniously to each of us, and walked out, Tommy carefully closing the door behind him.

"Perhaps his nibs is the only real thing in the way of conspirators; but if I don't show him a new wrinkle or two in the game before I have finished with him, you can write me down a jackass," he said, as he moved the screen from in front of the sleeping Russian. "My chance shot hit the mark; Ladislas bought his freedom by promising to return the medallion; but, as I suspect that this delegate knows the full inside history of things, I shall proceed to pump it out of him."

For the next hour Prince Lubetskoi was rigorously put through the hypnotic third degree, and as I listened I was more and more impressed by the absolutely correct conclusions at which Tommy had arrived.

Lubetskoi had the history at his fingers' ends; his father had commanded the troops which subdued Transylvania, and he himself had been intrusted by the czar with the direction of the search for the missing medallion. In the hypnotic trance the affectation of loyalty dropped from him, and he cynically portrayed his imperial master as he was—a weak, bigoted man, living in perpetual dread of assassination and the easy dupe of spiritualistic mediums, fortune tellers, and charlatans. The miniature icon meant everything to him; not only because of the Romanoff tradition, which made it a badge of supreme authority and its possessor sacred, but because a fortune teller—probably introduced at court through the plotting of Ladislas—had predicted that it would be instrumental in restoring the kingdom of Transylvania to its rightful rulers.

The prince acknowledged the truth of Mrs. Ridgway's story. She was, in fact, the daughter of Sergius, and, if her brother was dead, the heir to his rights and honors. It was by the order of the Russian government, which never forgets and has its spies and agents everywhere, that she had been kidnaped in Roumania, but believing her powerless so long as they retained the arch-plotter Ladislas, she was liberated.

Her departure from America after her marriage was reported, and the meeting with the gypsies at the Austrian frontier was arranged by the czar's agents, who through the old woman conveyed a mysterious warning of impending danger as coming from Ladislas. She was warned to keep all knowledge of it from her husband, unless she was willing to involve him in it, and to induce him to return immediately to America. When she eloped St. Petersburg was notified, and now the frontier was so carefully watched that any attempt to enter Transylvania would be followed by arrest.

On only one point he was not entirely clear, the fate of the son of Sergius. It was reported that he had been killed, but rumor had it that he was still alive, his identity hidden under the name of the Russian soldier into whose family he had been adopted.

Tommy smiled mischievously when he elicited this piece of information, and he made a critical examination of the Russian's face.

"The surest way to make Mrs. Ridgway valueless to Ladislas would be to resurrect the missing heir," he said. "If there is going to be a queen in the Ridgway family, I think I'll let the princess take a shot at it. Stand by now, for I'm going to wake him up, and he may try to prove that he is a Tartar, before I convince him that he is the long-lost heir."

He allowed no time for argument, for he immediately commanded the prince to awaken, which he did with a start, and looked about him confusedly.

"It's all right, Prince Lubetskoi," said Tommy soothingly. "You are too much a man of the world not to know when things are coming your way. My proceedings have been irregular, but they have prevented you from being made a cat's-paw."

"You have succeeded in making a fool of me!" exclaimed the Russian, starting to his feet, but when Tommy pointed his finger at him he collapsed.

"Your imperial master saved me that trouble," he said quietly. "It was worthy of Russian diplomacy to set Prince Alexander Gregoravitch, the rightful King of Transylvania, the task of recovering the medallion which proved his claim."

"But that duty was intrusted to me!" protested Lubetskoi feebly.

"Precisely, and you have been kept in ignorance of the fact that you are not the son of General Lubetskoi, but the son of Sergius, adopted by him at the command of the czar!"

It was curious to watch the effect of Tommy's announcement on the Russian. Incredulity gave way quickly to hope, and hope in turn to certainty, and in a moment the man whom he had been prepared to kill at the command of the czar was his accepted friend and ally.

"You can prove this!" he exclaimed; and Tommy nodded confidently.

"Is it necessary to ask for further proof than the mirror affords?" he asked. "The proof is nothing; but to profit by the fact is a different matter. You know the history of your house; for by your orders a transcript of it has been made here. You know that Ladislas, who has plotted all these years to place your sister on the throne, has kept together a secret organization in Transylvania. Knowing the weakness of his force, you know that he is powerless to carry out that design without the influence which the medallion would give him over a superstitious czar."

"Yes—yes—go on!" said Lubetskoi eagerly.

"I would suggest this, your majesty," continued Tommy, smiling. "See him, tell him who you are, and offer him unlimited power after you gain the throne. If he will support you and abandon your sister, I will promise that the medallion is forthcoming to further your scheme; if not, you and I will join forces and smash him first."

"And your share?" asked Lubetskoi suspiciously.

"I've always rather wanted to make a king, so I'll be satisfied with the glory," answered Tommy dryly. "And now I suggest that your majesty should toddle along and get busy. You needn't worry about the medallion

—I think that I have demonstrated my ability to look after it—and myself."

"We shall endeavor to make you forget our ill-advised and unwise attempt," answered Lubetskoi pompously, extending his hand, as if he expected Tommy to kiss it, but the latter only bowed low to hide the smile which he could not repress.

"Let me know when you can grant me an audience, your majesty," he said, and the Russian, oblivious to the sarcasm in his voice, graciously nodded assent.

"There's a forcible demonstration of how easy it is to make a man believe what he wants to believe," said Tommy, laughing and nodding after the disappearing back of the Russian. "He bears about as much resemblance to the Gregoravitches as he does to the Venus of Milo; but when he looks in the glass he'll recognize his Kalmuck face as a dead ringer for Sergius. He'll play the part, all right, and I reckon he'll keep Ladislas thinking while I have a chance to get after Mrs. Ridgway. Gee! if I had the clothes, I believe I'd set up for the King of Transylvania myself."

CHAPTER VII.

Had Tommy's anxiety for the safety of Mrs. Ridgway not been a very real one, he would have derived a mischievous satisfaction in seducing Prince Lubetskoi from the service of an unscrupulous master, playing upon his credulity and using him to embarrass the scheming of Count Ladislas; but he was too apprehensive to lose valuable time.

"The Duke of Rimnek, Count Ladislas, or Nicholas Lobenski is a dangerous man under any name," he said thoughtfully as he reviewed the situation with me the following morning. "Whether his plotting is actuated by patriotism or by the hope of selfish advancement will make very little difference to Mrs. Ridgway, for he would unhesitatingly sacrifice her to either."

"And do you think it wise to irritate him by setting that fool of a Russian on him?" I asked.

A whimsical smile came to his face, and he shrugged his very expressive shoulders.

"My dear boy, yesterday we escaped serious trouble by a very narrow margin; the next time the luck might not be with us," he answered. "Prince Lubetskoi has the morals and brains of—a Russian; the ferocity and brute courage of a Tartar, which he inherited from a father whose instinctive cruelty made him the favorite instrument of the czar for carrying out reprisals. Under the circumstances, I prefer that he should keep busy at something besides trying to get this medallion. I firmly believe that Mrs. Ridgway is in hiding in Paris, and I want to look for her with a whole skin while Ladislas is kept so busy that he won't try to get her across the frontier of Transylvania. The Russian Bear wouldn't let go of her again in a hurry, and we should be absolutely helpless to assist her."

"Tommy, in view of what might happen, would it not be wiser to ask the assistance of Le Garde in locating her?" I asked.

"Not with a secret treaty existing between the republic of France and the autocracy of Russia," he answered positively. "Remember that the police is a centralized force here, and a word from the Foreign Office might lead to her being escorted quietly to the frontier to avoid offending an ally. Without this medallion, through which Ladislas might influence the czar, he does not stand the slightest chance of success in fomenting rebellion; but it might be made worth his while to betray her into the hands of the Russian police."

"Who, if her story is true, voluntarily released her when they last had her under arrest," I objected.

"Yes, they released an ignorant, friendless girl, whom it was necessary for them to supply with current funds to keep from want," he answered. "They could hardly anticipate that she would become related by marriage to half the nobility of Europe and have the Ridgway millions at her back. That makes her a possibility as a very disturbing factor, and the peace of Transylvania is apt to be disturbed at any moment so long as she is at liberty. I am in hopes that Zeki will betray her hiding place to Clancy—and that should be his ring, so we may have news."

In answer to his cheery "Come in," the door opened, but instead of the detective, there entered a heavily veiled woman. We were instantly on our feet, cigarettes were hastily discarded, and there was a curious glint in Tommy's eyes as he bowed to our unexpected visitor.

"May I ask whom I have the honor of receiving?" he said; and a mocking laugh came from behind the veil.

"The wizard who discovers lost identities while you wait cannot penetrate the thin disguise of a piece of gauze!" she exclaimed incredulously. "Really, Mr. Williams, I am disappointed, for I fully expected that you would instinctively render homage to the future Queen of Transylvania!"

"Which one?" asked Tommy, a smile of amusement on his lips; and the lady laughed again.

"So much for your loyalty," she answered.

There was an unmistakable trace of the American accent in her pronunciation, and Tommy smiled as he courteously drew forward a chair for her.

"At present, I fear that you have to be satisfied with lesser rank, and I believe that I am addressing the Princess Lubetskoi?" he said interrogatively; and the lady raised her veil, disclosing a most attractive face and a pair of shrewd, laughing eyes.

"Exactly; a ci-devant countrywoman, who comes to find out what mischief you are planning when you put a wild bee in her husband's bonnet," she answered, as she sat down.

"Is it buzzing?" he asked evasively, and when I looked at him I realized that he intended to take full advantage of the opportunity to study this most attractive member of the gender feminine.

"I should say rather more than that; I believe that it has stung," she answered half seriously. "Now, Mr. Williams, you know—and you know that I know you know—that this story is all nonsense. What I want to know further is why you have told it to him."

"Am I to understand that you do not care to be a queen?" he asked banteringly.

"I most assuredly do not care to be a grass-widow through my husband's banishment to Siberia," she answered impatiently. "I suppose that you are skeptical about there being any real affection in these international marriages which involve money on one side and a title on the other, and I haven't come here to argue that point with you. Say that we accept your view; I do not intend to have my property taken from me."

"Rather let us say that yours was purely a love match; which I can quite believe," answered Tommy gallantly. "You prefer a prince at liberty to a king in confinement."

"Most assuredly," she said, smiling. "You probably know that a prince in Russia is rather less important than a policeman in New York; but I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my husband's position. He is highly placed at court, has the czar's confidence and affection, and, what is far more important to me, I love him!"

"But you are not ambitious for him?" asked Tommy.

The princess rose to her feet, her eyes flashing.

"Ambitious! Yes, I would have him the greatest man in Russia! There is a chance for that ambition, which is legitimate, to be realized. Don't misunderstand me—if I believed this cock-and-bull story which you have told him for some purpose of your own, there is no risk I would not run, no sacrifice I should hesitate to make to restore him to his own. But you know that you have deceived him, Mr. Williams; tempted him to dishonor, to disloyalty to the hand which has showered favors upon him."

"Do you happen to know just what that loyalty tempted him to do to me?" asked Tommy quietly.

"To teach you to keep out of affairs which do not concern you," she answered angrily.

His expression grew suddenly stern. "But which do most vitally concern the happiness of your brother, on whose behalf I am acting," he added; and the princess looked at him in surprise.

"Do you mean to tell me that my brother's happiness is bound up in that trumpery medallion?"

"If you will tell me just how much you know about that medallion, perhaps I can explain. First, let me assure you that I have your brother's entire confidence, and that I shall betray nothing which you choose to tell me."

"If you had been five years in Russia, you would be chary of confidences; but I believe that I can trust you." She looked at him intently. "I know only that the man who brings it to the czar can name his own reward. It is not because of its intrinsic value; but there is some mysterious association connected with it."

"Do you know how it came into your brother's possession?"

Her face flushed. "Through his Tzigane wife, I believe," she answered contemptuously. "With her past, perhaps it would be as well not to inquire too closely."

Tommy looked at her sharply, and his entire manner changed.

"Sit down!" he said imperatively, and the woman who had come to question him, but who had spent her time in answering, meekly obeyed. "Princess Lubetskoi, you are an American by birth, but your later education seems to have taught you to value rank and title. You tell me that you would encourage your husband to fight for what was rightfully his. Believing that he is the true heir to the throne of Sergius, do you blame him for placing the establishment of that claim above all else?"

"Is this a threat?"

"No, I never threaten. You have spoken slightingly of a woman whose name you should be the first to protect; but I make allowances for the point of view which you have acquired in your new surroundings. Perhaps it will be a solace to your injured pride when I tell you that the woman whom you despise as a Hungarian gypsy is, in fact, a princess by birth; the daughter of Sergius Gregoravitch!"

The smile of derision which the statement brought to her lips quickly faded, and her rosy color paled as she stared at him.

"Arty's wife—the Tzigane—Stephanie!" she faltered in bewilderment, and it was apparent that conviction was being borne in upon her by circumstances which she already knew of. "Let me think—can this be true—the explanation of——"

"Yes, it is undoubtedly true, unfortunately for Arthur Ridgway," interrupted Tommy seriously. "He loves her, Princess Lubetskoi, for herself; for he was ignorant of her rank when he married her."

For a moment the woman seemed stunned past seeing or hearing, but suddenly she sprang to her feet and grasped Tommy's arm so fiercely that he winced.

"Oh, make him take her away!" she cried. "There is no safety for her here! You don't know—you can't understand! It is not fire you are playing with—it is dynamite!"

"And an American girl can play with it safely?" asked Tommy, who was alertly watching for an opportunity.

"I am no longer American—I am a Russian!" she answered, fighting to regain her self-control. "But it is not a Russian who is warning you—it is Arthur's sister. Oh, Mr. Williams, make him take her to America. The knout, the dungeon, the salt mines—oh, I can't tell you the horror of it!" she exclaimed, and throwing herself in the chair she gave way to an attack of sobbing.

"And I can tell Arthur Ridgway's sister what I should hesitate to tell the Princess Lubetskoi," said Tommy after watching her for a moment. "A thing which concerns his happiness and——"

"Tell me nothing!" she interrupted passionately. "I have said now enough to send those I love to a fate worse than death if it becomes known."

"Nothing shall be known," he continued reassuringly. "I shall tell you much more, that you may help me."

"Mr. Williams, I beg of you to let me go," she implored. "Knowledge is dangerous, and you do not know what we Russians do. The knout or the rack may make us tell what we wish to conceal."

"All that I can tell you, and far more, is already known to the secret police. Mrs. Ridgway has deserted her husband to return to her own country."

"Then she is lost!" exclaimed the princess hopelessly. "Now I understand why I have been so spied upon and the meaning of the continual questionings about my sister-in-law whom I have never seen. Only last week the ambassador gave me a hint, which was almost equivalent to a royal command, to call upon her and invite her to St. Petersburg. Can't you see the danger, Mr. Williams, and that you have made it impossible for me to help you by implanting this wild idea in my husband's brain?"

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and your husband's plotting for his own advancement may mean your sister-in-law's safety, princess. Yesterday he was prepared to connive at my murder; to-day he looks upon me as invaluable to his cause. I am perhaps unduly solicitous about my own safety; for on it depends very much at the moment. If Mrs. Ridgway is restored to her husband, no harm will come to Prince Lubetskoi. More than that, if you can assist me to bring that about,

I can safely promise that he will be in a position to claim the reward for the recovery of the medallion."

"And are you now appealing to an American or a Russian?" she asked.

"First of all, to a woman. I can't believe that you would allow your brother's happiness to be irretrievably sacrificed."

"Do you know where Mrs. Ridgway is?"

"In Paris, I believe; I am not sure."

"Mr. Williams, may I ask if all this counterplotting on your part—the publication of the attempted kidnaping, the advertisement of the fact that you have the medallion which is more dangerous than a rattlesnake about your neck, and the playing upon my husband's credulity to make him a traitor and a cat's-paw—is solely for the purpose of inducing Mrs. Ridgway to return to her husband?"

"I have absolutely no other purpose." And there was a trace of pity in the smile which his serious answer brought to her lips.

"Then I should say that while your motive may be altruistic and praiseworthy, your methods are masculinely clumsy," she answered. "A shrewd man and a student of human nature you may be, but your knowledge of women is small."

"A fact which I regretfully acknowledge and from which I have suffered much," admitted Tommy ruefully. "I am willing to be instructed in so fascinating a subject, Princess Lubetskoi."

"Then perhaps you could have no better teacher than I," she answered. "I know my own countrywomen and I know the women of the courts; for I have not been lady of honor for five years to the czarina for nothing. Let me tell you this: ambition may lead a woman to do many things which seem incredible, a sense of duty may enable her to endure martyrdom cheerfully, but whether she be born in the royal purple or under a gypsy tent there is one passion which is stronger than all."

"And that is?"

"When you have learned that, you may be able to do without my assistance," she answered mockingly. "Does my expert knowledge entitle me to your assistance?"

"In keeping Prince Lubetskoi out of trouble?"

"In not leading him into temptation."

"Yes, if you will lend me your valuable assistance in my quest," he answered promptly; and she extended a dainty hand to bind the bargain.

"Then one thing you must tell me frankly," she said quietly, all trace of banter leaving her voice and manner. "How is my husband concerned in the plot against her?"

"Prince Lubetskoi, until he became convinced that he himself was entitled to the throne of Transylvania, was mainly concerned in recovering the medallion, without which no pretender could hope for success," answered Tommy. "He was aware of her claims; but whether his devotion to the czar would have led him to betray her into his hands, you must judge for yourself."

Her eyes dropped under his earnest gaze, and her hands played nervously with her handkerchief.

"Let us hope that he may be spared the necessity for making such a decision," she said, with a little shudder. "May I write a letter here, Mr. Williams?"

Tommy cleared off his desk, and she seated herself at it and wrote rapidly, carefully placing the sheets in her muff when she had finished.

"And now remember that we are allies, not enemies," she said earnestly. "Now I am a woman and Arthur Ridgway's sister; when success perches on our banners, I shall remind you that I am an ambitious Russian."

"And you shall have the medallion," answered Tommy, bending over the hand which she extended to him.

The soft rustle of her skirts had hardly died away when it was replaced by the heavy tread of police boots in the hallway, and Clancy, visibly swollen with self-importance and his eyes dancing with excitement, rushed into the studio.

"Sure, Mr. Williams, ut's no cheap skates I'm in wid now!" he exclaimed. "Ut's only a small matter av murder, arson, kidnapin', an' general diviltry as stands bechune me an' bein' made a juke an' th' chief av the polis av Thransylvania, no less!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Clancy's excitement, so far as I was concerned, was contagious; but Tommy was apparently prepared for anything, and after bringing the detective back to earth with a sharp injunction to attend to business and cut out the frills, he listened calmly.

"Sure, I never suspicioned that a dago fiddler—an' a blame poor wan at that—w'u'd be hand in glove wid princes an' th' likes av them; but politics makes quare bedfellows, as they say at Tammany Hall, an' ut's meself as has the chanst to get into th' crame de lar crame, as me grisette friend calls ut," remarked Clancy. "Ut's all along av me gettin' next to me friend Zeke; an' travelin' wid him is ruinous to th' constitootion av a man that can't put away three small bottles an hour; for he's sure a swift wan. I've been layin' to find out his game, for from the wad he carries ut's got a polis job faded, an' last night he loosens up.

"'You lik da mon?' he says, after we'd had a few.

"'No wan better,' says I; an' he laughs.

"'Sarge, you're a gooda man,' says he. 'You helpa me an' you have plenta mon, grand name, an' fine job. You lika be a juke?'

"'Clancys was kings in Ireland, so I guess I c'u'd hold th' job an' give satisfaction,' says I; an' he pats me on th' back.

"'Now, Sarge,' says he, 'you're alla righta.'

"An' then he mentions th' few trifles av felonies I'm to commit to get th' job, as cool as if he was givin' me an invite to a pink tea. It seems that them other johnnies in th' red coats at th' chop-suey joint where I met him are all jukes an' counts an' barons in disguise. They lost their regular jobs when a king got put out av business down Thransylvania way, an' when they're not spoilin' th' guests' appetites by murderin' music, they're a band av beetle-browed conspirators, plottin' to get their jobs back by raisin' a ruction. The head Fenian av th' bunch is a guy named Ladislas, an' ut was to him that he takes me this mornin'!"

"Does he lead the band?" asked Tommy.

Clancy shook his head, and his face grew serious. "Say, Mr. Williams, he's th' real thing, all right, all right. Mebbe them four-flushers in th' band is, too, but they don't look ut, an' he sure does. Say, there ain't no dago about his talk, an' he speaks United States as good as

me. Zeke he downs on his knees an' kisses his hand when we goes in, an' blamed if I don't believe I'd have followed suit at a word; but he never gives ut.

"'Now, me man,' says he—an' his voice reminds me av th' commissioner when he's got a patrolman on th' carpet—'Zeke says you're all to th' good, an' ut's him that'll get ut in th' neck if you throw me down'—or words to that effect. I was feelin' sorry for Zeke about then, for I knew he meant what he said; but business is business, an' I chips along.

"'An' he's put me wise that there's somethin' in ut for me,' I says. 'Does that go?'

"'Ut does,' he says, 'if youse makes good.' An' then he repeats th' string av felonies that'd give me a lifer if I missed th' chair.

"'There's an American named Ridgway, he dies and you turns th' trick,' says he. 'To-night his house will burn an' in th' excitement th' baby is swiped,' says he. 'That part for youse, after polishin' off th' old man, an' there must be no mistake.'

"'Do I burn th' house, too?' says I, as if I couldn't get enough crime to satisfy me, but he allows that his friends th' disguised counts will attend to that.

"Then he gives me th' office, an' th' plan's a peach, all right; but Le Garde must be asleep if they get away with ut; to say nothin' av th' other guy that's tryin' to butt in."

Tommy had listened attentively, and with a few curt questions he elicited so much of the details as had been confided to Clancy.

At nine o'clock Ridgway's house was to be set on fire in several places. Clancy was previously to have gained admittance and a private interview on the plea that he had important news from New York, and on the first alarm was to kill Ridgway with a blackjack. Then, under pretense of saving it, he was to seize the baby and run with it to the garden. Ladislas himself would meet him there and guide him to a waiting automobile. Clancy was to carry the baby to a woman whom he was to persuade that he came from its father and was deputed by him to carry them both to Hungary, where he was waiting for them and would be in grave danger unless she came. At Ladislas' castle they would be joined by the other conspirators and proceed at once to Transylvania, where everything was prepared for revolt.

The conspirators were to be rewarded; Clancy ennobled, granted estates, and made chief of police. He had been supplied with an exact plan of Ridgway's house and garden, the places where the fires were to be started, and the route he was to follow plainly marked on it.

Tommy studied it closely for a few minutes, and then looked up at him.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he asked; and Clancy smiled.

"Sure, ut's a murderer I must be lookin' like in me glad rags," he said. "No sooner do I take on this contract from Ladislas an' leave th' house, than another guy gives me a jolly an' tries to t'row a scare into me. He had a bad attack av whiskers, an' I piped him for a Roosian. 'Twas a new drink he tries on me; vodka he calls ut, an' we'll let it go at that. He's been shadowin' me an' Zeke, he says, an' I'm sure up against real trouble unless I gives up me present job an' works for his boss, who's th' real thing in things av Thransylvania."

"Another murder job?" asked Tommy quickly.

"Sure, an' youse is it, this time!" exclaimed Clancy.

"For a small matter of a locket?"

"No less," answered the detective. "Dead or alive, youse is to give ut up; but he didn't say nothin' about me jukedom, so I'll tend to th' other wan first."

"Clancy, you're a jewel!" exclaimed Tommy approvingly. "You'll keep that appointment to-night, and you'll find me there ahead of you. In all of this talk, have you discovered the address of the woman whom you are to escort to Transylvania?"

"Th' divil a wan av me knows," answered Clancy. "Weemen a plenty is in ut, for Zeke is lallygaggin' wid th' dago nurse, an' he's next to everything that goes on in th' house. He's told me all about her, but that Juke Ladislas he's close about th' other wan, an' all he tells me is that I must give her a convincin' pipe story when I brings th' kid to her."

"Clancy, I'm afraid that you're not enough of a villain to earn the dukedom, but if Arthur Ridgway has the pull I credit him with, you'll get the first vacant inspectorship in New York," said Tommy; and a smile of unusual proportions illuminated the Hibernian face.

"Wid th' perquisites, that's good enough for Mike Clancy!" he exclaimed. "I'll cable for me stripes this night."

"You can send this telegram first," said Tommy, as he filled out a blank. "Now cut out the small bottles and be on hand sharp at nine."

Clancy departed, whistling joyously, but Tommy turned to me with serious face.

"If recent Balkan history did not include a royal murder, intrigue, and treachery, which seems incredible, I should say that we had been transported to the land of the dime novel," he said, shaking his head. "That the theater is set in Paris and some of the actors commonplace Americans is merely an incident, for we are living in an atmosphere which makes Benvenuto Cellini's memoirs dull reading by comparison. I have to pinch myself every few minutes to make sure that I am awake, but unless I am very much mistaken there will be doings at the Avenue d'Ienna to-night."

"In which I trust we shall take part," I said; and he gave quick assent.

"I suppose that I should report progress to our new ally, but I don't see how I can," he continued. "That fool of a husband is not playing the game according to Hoyle, and he stands a chance of getting hurt, but I am not responsible for that. I have telegraphed to Ridgway to admit us through the stables at eight-thirty to-night, and I shall notify Le Garde just before we go there that there is something wrong. He ought to get the incendiaries, and I reckon that we can take care of things inside the house. My idea is to bag Ladislas in the garden, give him a chance to get away, if he will take us to where Mrs. Ridgway is hidden, and then get them packed off to Ridgway's yacht which is lying at Havre. If Ladislas refuses, I shall hand him over to the police, for he is desperate, and we can't take any more chances."

"Tommy, doesn't the fact that he is adopting this desperate plan in the heart of Paris indicate that the lady has turned obstinate?" I asked; and he winked aggravatingly.

"My boy, you are improving," he answered. "Of course

she has; the kidnaping of the baby is a last resort. Ladislas has failed once with the tools at hand, and that is why he tries to enlist Clancy in his service. The little addition of the murder of Ridgway may be along the line of burning the bridges behind her. I'm not going to puzzle my brain by problems to which we can find no answer, but if that delegate doesn't give us satisfaction to-night there will be a vacant Dukedom of Rimnek, unless he has an heir."

A thousand questions occurred to me before the time for our departure for Ridgway's house, but Tommy growled when I ventured to ask the first one, and I knew that he would give me no satisfaction. A dozen times he examined the miniature icon, and almost as often he inspected his revolver to satisfy himself that the cartridges were perfect; but not a word would he say until the hands of the clock pointed to eight.

"Now for it!" he exclaimed, jumping from his chair. "Just time to make the rendezvous comfortably." And I meekly followed.

Ridgway, consumed with impatience and anxiety, was awaiting us in the carriage house, a litter of the evening papers strewn about the floor.

"This is disgraceful!" he fumed. "I trust that you are not responsible for this, Mr. Williams."

"For what?" asked Tommy in amazement.

Ridgway pointed to the papers. "For the scurrilous article which is in every evening journal of Paris," he answered angrily. "My misfortunes are ridiculed, and I am made a fool, or a villain!"

"There will be time enough to discuss that if you are alive an hour from now, but we have other work on hand," said Tommy quietly. "Ridgway, if you value your own life and that of your child, get back to the house."

Ridgway looked at him in quick apprehension and realized that he was in deadly earnest, and without speaking led us through the covered passage to the house.

"Who is with the baby?" asked Tommy quickly

"Miss Griscom and Julie," answered Ridgway. "Is there unusual danger?"

The question was not answered, for the door of the study to which he had conducted us was opened, and Ridgway started forward with such a cry as I have never heard from the throat of man. Standing in the doorway was a beautiful woman, her eyes flashing, her lips compressed, and her face the color of chalk; but in spite of the changed expression we recognized the face which had smiled at us from the Kussner miniature!

"Nelka!" exclaimed Ridgway, advancing with open arms; but she raised her hand almost threateningly and pointed at him.

"No, not Nelka!" she said passionately. "You have killed her; but Stephanie, the mother, has come to demand her child from an unworthy father."

Ridgway looked at her helplessly, unable to realize that he had heard correctly, and Tommy glanced significantly at a crumpled paper which she held in her hand.

Mrs. Ridgway, for she it undoubtedly was, slowly opened it, and pointed to a heavily marked paragraph.

"Is this the reward for my love of you; a love which has made me refuse to accept a throne that you could not share with me?" she said contemptuously. "Is this the fidelity of man which cannot endure a month's separation? Give me my child and I shall leave you to your new-found love and go to fulfill my destiny!"

"Nelka! You believe that lying article?" cried Ridgway, taking it from her and throwing it aside. "It is false from beginning to end. Miss Griscom has been a faithful servant, and I a faithful lover to the woman who deserted me."

His wife looked at him unbelievingly, jealous anger written on her face; and Tommy smiled covertly as he stooped and picked up the paper.

"Will Mrs. Ridgway allow me to intrude——" He paused, listening attentively for a moment, and the chiming of nine from a clock on the mantel rang through the room. "If you will permit me to go to the garden for a moment, I can find some one who will give you the explanation of this mystery," he went on quickly. "Quick, old chap! Make for the garden, for Clancy has failed us!"

Before I could move, Mrs. Ridgway was thrust violently aside, and a waving mass of arms and legs seemed to fill the room. It quickly resolved itself into a very red-faced Irish-American who was using the heads of two men, whom he held by the necks, as castanets, bumping them together until they fairly cracked.

"Th' divil a bit have I failed youse—be good, ye divils, or I'll crack youse in earnest—but these two was in me way, settlin' a small difficulty av their own, an' I had to bring 'em in, for wan av them is me friend Zeke."

His prisoners, in the practiced hands of a well-trained officer, had stopped their useless efforts to get at each other, but hatred shone from their eyes.

"Skelton! Zeki! What is the meaning of this?" said Ridgway in amazement.

Tommy motioned to Clancy to release them.

"Mr. Ridgway, let no one leave this room," he said sharply. "Now, Clancy, follow me to the garden and get our friend."

A moment later we were in the old garden, where we would have been hopelessly lost in the winding paths had not a man stepped quietly from concealment and addressed us in a low voice.

"This way, messieurs," he said, showing a small electric pocket lamp. "Our friend the conspirator has entered the house."

For a moment the light flashed on his face, and we recognized Le Garde, the chief of the French secret police.

"I have the others, and he knows that something is wrong, and has gone to investigate," he said quietly. "He entered by that window, but he cannot escape, for the house is surrounded."

Tommy gave an exclamation of fear as the Frenchman pointed to an open window, for it opened into the room adjoining the nursery. We ran toward it, but before we reached it the light was switched on, there was a sharp report, and a man reeled to the window, and fell to the ground at our feet.

Le Garde cleared his prostrate body, and would have entered, but Tommy grasped him and pulled him back.

"If I am not mistaken, there is the one kind of a woman whom you would not understand on the other side of that wall, and I happen to know that the pistol she carries has five more charges, for I loaded it myself," he said grimly. "Oh, Miss Griscom! Be careful, we are friends."

"Step into the light, one at a time, then, and don't come too close," answered a calm voice from inside;

and Tommy, thrusting Le Garde unceremoniously aside, stepped forward.

The nurse, covering him with a pistol from which a wisp of smoke was still curling, came to the window, and when she saw his face, the weapon, which had been as steady as a rock, wavered, and, throwing it aside, she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Well, I'll be——"

"Pardon me," Le Garde interrupted, as Tommy stared at her in blank amazement. "My friend the amateur seems also not to understand completely. The lady has spared me much trouble, for, if I am not mistaken, she has quieted forever one of the busiest plotters in Europe."

He turned the light of his lamp on the face of the prostrate man, and a small hole directly in the middle of the forehead testified how true had been Miss Griscom's aim. Nicholas Lobenski, Duke of Himnek, had woven his last web, and had himself met death in its meshes, but as we looked at the peaceful, high-bred face we instinctively bared our heads.

"He was not good, he was thoroughly jesuitical—but he was a man!" said Le Garde, as he rose from softly closing the eyelids and composing the limbs; and better men have gone to their tombs with a less sincere tribute.

A glance into the nursery told the story. In desperation at the failure of his subordinates, he had attempted to take the child, which was sleeping quietly, and Miss Griscom had followed out her orders, and shot him.

Le Garde assured us that there would be no unpleasant results for the girl, as she had acted in defense of her charge, but she was not to be comforted. It seemed to me that Tommy put an entirely unnecessary amount of feeling into his efforts to console her, and I was relieved when they were interrupted by the entrance of the Princess Lubetskoi.

"I have come to claim my reward, Mr. Williams," she said triumphantly. "Mrs. Ridgway is here, and I think that I may claim the credit for it."

"Was not a reconciliation part of the agreement?" he asked; but I saw that his hand was stealing toward the hidden medallion.

"You would have little cause to doubt that, if you had seen them as I left them a moment ago," she answered, smiling. "Peace and good-will are overflowing in the study, and Skelton is guarding the door against interruption, and sitting on a swearing gypsy at the same time. Stephanie has wisely decided that a sure kingdom in a man's heart is preferable to a doubtful one in the Balkans, but it took a woman's wit to teach her."

"Or a woman's pen," said Tommy, looking at her sharply; and her face flushed.

"Probably a man would have let everything go to smash rather than employ a woman's weapons," she answered, glancing apologetically toward Miss Griscom. "But remember one thing, if you are inclined to blame me: I was fighting not only for reward, but to save the man I love."

"I shall forgive you everything if you will answer one question," said Tommy earnestly, as he drew the medallion above his collar and unclasped the chain. "Is jealousy really the strongest emotion which controls a woman?"

The Princess Lubetskoi was silent for a moment as she carefully adjusted the chain about her own neck; but there was a twinkle of mischief in her eyes as she glanced from him to the pretty face of the girl whom he had been trying to comfort.

"That is one of the questions which, perhaps, an unmarried woman could answer more satisfactorily," she said; and when Tommy's slim fingers twirled the ends of his mustache, I realized that he was as well satisfied to have the question left open for further investigation.

THE END.

WHAT IS SOFT WATER.

All natural waters contain a greater or less amount of mineral matter in solution. Rain water has the smallest percentage of solid impurities of any, and, therefore, it is taken as the standard variety of soft water.

The terms soft and hard, however, as applied to water, are, scientifically considered, purely relative.

A water is usually reckoned to be "soft" when it contains less than one-five-thousandth part of its weight of mineral ingredients, and "hard" when it contains more than one-four-thousandth.

Soft water has the property of easily forming a lather with soap, and is, therefore, suitable for washing purposes; while hard water will only form a lather, and that imperfectly, with considerable difficulty.

A mineral water has more than one-two-thousandth of its weight of natural dissolved solids, and a medicinal water is a variety of mineral water containing a varying percentage of dissolved natural solid or gaseous drugs.

ALREADY REGISTERED.

Mr. Smith, a traveler, arrived one evening at a hotel in Austria. On the way he had picked up a smart German, and hired him as his servant. In Austria every one staying at a hotel is obliged to register his name and occupation in a book, which is kept for police examination, so Mr. Smith told his servant Fritz to bring this book for him to write his name.

"I have already registered milor," said Fritz, "as an American gentleman of independent means."

"But I've never told you my name, so how do you know what it is?"

"I copied it from milor's portmanteau," answered Fritz.

"Why, it ain't on my portmanteau," cried Mr. Smith; "bring the book, and let me see what you have put down."

The book was brought, and Mr. Smith, to his amusement, discovered that his clever servant had described him as:

"Monsieur Warranted Solid Leather!"

COSSACK SUPERSTITION.

Among the numerous superstitions of the Cossacks there is none stronger than the belief that they will enter heaven in a better state if they are personally clean at the time they are killed. Consequently, before an expected battle they perform their toilets with scrupulous care, dress themselves in clean garments, and put on the best they have. This superstition is not confined to the Cossacks alone, but is widely prevalent in all branches of the Russian army.

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Dressed as Man, She Sees Lover's Deceit.

Miss Daisy White, twenty-two, while dressed in men's clothes, was arrested after she had followed her fiancé and a society girl to the latter's home.

When arrested, Miss White was dodging through a back alley, trying to reach her home. A policeman, thinking "he" had committed some crime, arrested her.

At the station house the girl explained matters and was permitted to go home. In police court she said: "I have been going with my beau for about a year, and I thought he was all mine. Lately I have been hearing things, so I decided to learn at firsthand how the land lay.

"I dressed myself in men's clothes and went over to the musical concert in the park, where I saw him promenading through the park with another girl on his arm. I followed him and saw them enter her home, a little ways off from the park.

"About that time I realized my situation. So I began to dodge through the crowds, and was making for home through the alley when the officer caught me."

Miner Sues for Large Sum.

This is how Thomas Smith, a coal miner, of Fort Smith, Ark., itemizes his claim for $220,000 damages against the Central Coal & Coke Company of Kansas City for injuries sustained when a roof of a mine passageway fell on him, in a suit filed in the United States Court:

Seventy-five thousand for loss of future earning power.

Twenty-five thousand for medical attention and other expenditures.

Twenty-five thousand for humiliating physical condition.

Ten thousand for fear of impending death.

Ten thousand for hunger, want, and constant mortifications.

Ten thousand for fear of deprivations after trial.

Five thousand for loss of earnings to date of trial.

Stonewall Jackson's Aid Dies.

Captain William Fitzhugh Randolph, Stonewall Jackson's aid, who was with the noted Confederate leader when he received his death wound, is dead at Warren, W. Va., at the age of eighty-three years.

Grows Seedless Cucumbers.

Two large specimens of a "seedless" cucumber—the first ever grown in the vicinity of Springfield, Mo., were brought to town by William Plum, a German truck gardener.

One of the cucumbers measures eighteen inches, and the other one twelve. They are long, green specimens and have a decidedly different appearance from their American relative.

The Seven Varities of Flies.

Seven different varieties of flies are found in our houses, ninety-eight per cent of which are represented by the common house fly. Flies lay their eggs only in fermenting or decaying substances—by preference in manure. Hence every stable is a center of infection unless periodically disinfected. The fly maggot is also hatched out in ashpit refuse, such as bedding, straw, rags, paper, scraps of meat, fruit, et cetera, on which substances the larvæ subsist after they hatch, which occurs in about twelve days after the egg has been laid. It is estimated that a single fly, laying 120 eggs at a time, will produce other flies to the number of sextillions by the end of the season.

Snakes and Bugs Ship's Load.

Four snakes, eighteen tarantulas, seventy rats, enough roaches to almost fill a barrel, and bedbugs by the hundreds formed part of the cargo of a freight vessel sailing tropical seas and which was fumigated at New Orleans, La., in connection with the fight against bubonic plague. Two of the snakes were boa constrictors.

Hen's Walk About in Circles.

Seven "crazy" chickens at David Clark's farm, near Azalia, Ind., are attracting considerable attention. Their unusual condition is due to an electrical shock received during a recent storm. Thirty-five chickens were in a coop under a tree that was struck by lightning. Twenty-eight were killed and the other seven have been running around in circles, bumping against the fences and doing other strange "stunts" since.

One Killed in Cloudburst.

A cloudburst, centering ten miles north of Colorado Springs, Col., reaped a toll of one life and did damage totaling $100,000 in the vicinity. The Fountain Creek is on a rampage, sweeping down the Fountain Valley toward Pueblo. Railroad traffic was demoralized.

His Mind Blank Once a Year.

A young man found on the streets at Cincinnati, Ohio, suffering from amnesia, has recovered his memory and says his name is Miller. Miller says that he loses his memory for a day or two every year, and attributes it to a blow on the head which he sustained about six years ago. His mother, the young man says, resides in Huntington, W. Va.

His Charity Check no Good.

Howard Murphey asked Mrs. Ben McKinley, his washwoman, how she was getting along. When she told him she was $19 behind on her rent, Murphey wrote her a check for $20. Mrs. McKinley paid her rent and bought some groceries with the extra dollar.

Later the check came back from the bank marked "N. G." The sheriff is looking for Murphey.

Hatpin Repulses a Bandit.

Members of the Merry Maidens' Club, composed of girls and young women either permanent or summer residents of the country about Lake Waccabuc, Westchester County, N. Y., were returning from a straw ride when a holdup man climbed over the rear of the vehicle, pointed a revolver at them, and ordered them to keep their mouths shut. Instantly there was a chorus of shrieks and screams.

The only man in the party was Charles Hawley, the driver.

As the robber leaned over to remove a diamond ring from the finger of the last girl, making a pretense of covering the party with his revolver, Ada Mead, using her hatpin as a weapon, made a thrust at the man's back. Then she pushed him and he fell over the rear of the wagon into the road. Hawley whipped up the horses. The man in the road blazed away in the darkness, but his bullets hit nothing.

Gets Homer on Caught Ball.

In the fifth inning of a game between Newark, N. J., and Montreal, Canada, Deininger, of Montreal, hit a low liner to left field. Zimmerman, Newark left fielder, gave chase and, running backward, speared the ball. Just as he made the catch, he fell over the short left-field fence. Fans claimed he held on, but the umpires said that, as they couldn't see the ball, it counted as a homer. Zimmerman was knocked out by the fall, but was revived and resumed playing.

Wild-west Show Shoots Up.

Armed with repeating rifles and firing volleys into the air, eighteen former employees of Young Buffalo's Wild-west Show held up the entire equipment of the recently disbanded company and drove off a train crew which attempted to take twelve of the show cars out of the yards at Alton, near St. Louis, Mo.

At the same time a large number of the show people appealed to the police. A party of twenty-six Sioux Indians, set adrift by the disbanding of the company, were among the riotous employees.

At Two Months, Loses Appendix.

The unusual task of removing the appedix from a baby but two months old was accomplished at the County Hospital, at Denver, Col., by Doctor Ray Taylor. The child is the son of L. Brockman, a gardener, and had been ill for more than a week. The operation lasted but a few minutes, and the baby opened its eyes within thirty minutes after the operation was performed.

Lightning Takes Ring Off.

A curious freak of lightning was reported at Amarillo, Texas, when it was said that lightning during a storm yesterday knocked a ring off the finger of Miss Mary Jennings of Cañon City, near here. It was stated the girl said she felt a jerk as the ring left her finger, but that she was uninjured.

Pawns His Money to Cheat Sharks.

"Experience is a dear school, but many profit thereby."

This is a liberal translation of an old Latin proverb, and Bascom Truskett, of Menoken, Kan., admitted that he had learned something in the dear school of experience when he appeared at the welfare loan agency, at Topeka, and wanted to deposit seven dollars with Ralph Perry, manager of that department.

"What do you want to leave your money here for?" asked Mr. Perry. "Why not leave it at some bank?"

"There's a circus in town, that's the reason," replied Truskett firmly. "It'll be here for two days, too. I ain't takin' no chances o' gettin' skint again by them sharpers."

"I don't understand yet," insisted Perry.

"Well," Truskett explained, "ye see Menoken is not fur from Topeka, and whenever a circus comes there, business in Menoken closes and everybody goes in to the circus. But when we all get back home, and each feller concludes to tell the truth, them as wasn't pickpocketed out o' their roll lost it trying to find which one o' three shells a little black ball was under. And I never heard o' any one pickin' the right shell from our neighborhood. Now, I intend to see this circus, and if I git pickpocketed, the pesky brutes won't git nothin'."

"Then you don't intend to try to find the little black ball under the shell any more?" asked Perry.

"Not me," replied Truskett. "I've seen that ball go under one o' them shells as square as my eyes could look at it; seen the feller lift the shell and seen the ball right under there. Then, when I bet and he raised the shell, I found I was mistaken, or else the gambler was purty slick, fur I was watching him all the time. Tain't no use monkeying with that game."

Perry told Truskett that the loan agency could not act as a depository, and that the only way that he could retain the money for him was to make him a loan in the regular way.

"How much do you want on the seven dollars?" asked Perry.

"Jest gimme a nickel on it," smiled Truskett. "I've got enough to see the show, but I ain't takin' no chances."

A pledge ticket for five cents was made out in the regular way and the ticket and nickel given to the wise man from Menoken, Kan.

Goat Eats With Two Mouths.

Coly Horton, of Concord, N. C., is the proud owner of a kid which is unusual in that it has four eyes, two noses, and two mouths, but otherwise is normal. It eats with both mouths at the same time. Horton has refused $100 for the freak goat.

Boy Models Wilson's Bust.

President Wilson was recently presented with a clay bust of himself modeled by John Bates, a fourteen-year-old boy of Salt Lake City, Utah. Senator Smoot presented the bust.

Bombs Close Two "Movies."

Patrons of two moving-picture theaters in Chicago were forced to leave when bombs, filled with an offensive liquid, were thrown into the theaters. Two men who were seen to throw two "bombs" into the motion-picture theater of William Payne were taken into custody.

The trouble, according to Charles Wacker, owner of a theater, who captured the two alleged bomb throwers, is caused by rivalry between two factions of the motion-picture operators' union.

She Deeds Her Farm Back to Government.

For the first time in history a farm has been deeded back to the government after it became known the land had been improperly filed on. As a result the funds in the United States treasury have been increased $5,000, for Mrs. Mary Mitchell, who lives just across the line from Denver, Col., in Nebraska, turned over property valued at that amount after she became converted.

Before Mrs. Mitchell "got religion," as she expressed it, she got from the government 160 acres of good Nebraska

farm land by a method which has since been found irregular.

The day after her conversion she wrote a letter denouncing herself. She is now the wife of a prominent Nebraska resident, a former office holder, and herself prominent in educational circles in more than one State of the West. She writes that she now has "peace of mind" since she gave back that $5,000 farm. The letter came to the office of M. D. McEniry, chief of the field division of the general land office. She frankly said she had proved up on 160 acres of land a year ago.

She confessed she had made statements not justified as to matters necessary to make final proof on the claim. Special Agent J. L. Stack was assigned to investigate. He went to the county seat and found the farm standing in the name of Mrs. Mitchell. Then he went to the farm and found it was rich with golden corn and wheat.

Acting upon the advice of his superior officer in Denver, Stack told the woman that inasmuch as she had admitted irregularities in obtaining the farm, there was only one course to pursue, and that was to deed it back to the government. She signed the necessary papers.

Callops With Jaw Unjointed.

When Harry Stauffer was sixteen miles from Granite, Ore., and thirty miles from the nearest physician, he dislocated his jaw. The only way to get to a doctor was to ride horseback, and this Stauffer did. Stauffer's mouth was hanging open, but he was unable to speak and was suffering intense pain. The physician, on the highway, by the light of a lantern beneath a lonesome pine on the roadside, set Stauffer's jaw.

It was eight hours from the time the accident happened until relief was given.

Farmers Will Own Railroad.

Indications are that the Lancaster, Oxford & Southern Railroad, in Pennsylvania, which suspended operations some time ago, will soon have its trains running again. Farmers along the line expect to raise $50,000 to buy the road and reëquip it.

War Declared on Hungry Army Worm.

War has been declared throughout the country on the "army worm," known to scientists as Leucania unipuncta. The worm has laid waste thousands of acres of crops and will ruin still more unless it is exterminated. It is estimated that it has caused $1,000,000 worth of damage in Michigan alone this year.

The army-worm pest, first reported in the East a few weeks past, has reached the Middle West in alarming numbers. Even in Chicago the worm is destroying lawns and attacking flower beds.

Near Aurora, Ill., the farmers went into the fields to cut oats by lantern light to save the crop from the devouring worms. In various parts of the country farmers are waging war on the worm under the direction of members of an automobile squadron sent out by Stephen A. Forbes, State entomologist, at Urbana, Ill.

There are many ways to slap the Leucania unipuncta. Probably none is more satisfactory than to beat him to death with a club. But to bring the swiftest death to the greatest number Forbes gives his favorite prescription as follows:

"Take twenty pounds of bran, one pound of paris green, and a little sirup. Mix into a crumbly bran mash. Then sow in the evening over the troubled area. The next day go out and count the dead."

The army worm is a brute of mystery and eccentricity. He has no trouble at all in giving life to three generations in a season. Yet it is scientifically undetermined how he lives through the long, hard winter. The worm is but one of the forms between the egg and a moth.

The egg produces the hungry larva, or worm, which, after a proper period of nutrition on vegetable matter, descends into earth and becomes the pupa, from which appears the dark-gray, yellow-striped moth, the producer of eggs in vast numbers.

A succession of two or more dry seasons encourages the army worm to greater numbers. Then come the parasites that live on the army worm. The scientists have detected among them the pachima, a flylike organism, which lays eggs on the larva of the Leucania unipuncta.

The eggs of these parasites hatch, and presently the worm succumbs to difficulties in his department of the interior.

"The army worm is with us always," said Mr. Forbes, in Urbana, last night. "Only at periods when conditions conduce to its multiplication it becomes a noticeable pest. When it is produced in great numbers, it is necessary for some of the worms to travel to get food—then it becomes known as the army worm. The individual worm does not travel far."

Driven from Work by Swarms of Ants.

Workers in the sand pits near Wellington, Col., have been twice driven from their work in two days by swarms of winged ants. The insects have a bite that is almost as poisonous as the sting of bees. They have attacked men and horses alike, causing great lumps and swellings upon the men and driving the horses nearly frantic.

These flying ants are the hatch of this year. When they attain maturity, they are equipped with wings, and during the hottest days come to the surface of the sand pits, where many of them fly away. Some are caught by the older workers in the anthills and they are shorn of their wings and carried back into the galleries, to become industrious members of the community. The swarms usually come out early in July, but this year they have been delayed by wet weather.

Twice teams have run away from the sand, where the insects were emerging in clouds. Men have had to take gunny sacks and whip into the swarms to drive them away. They have killed millions of them in this manner.

Jingle of Glass Charm Big Fish.

When George Sinclair, of Holland, Mich., discovered that music charms fish, he kept the secret which gave him the reputation of being the best and most successful fisherman in Michigan waters, but he has finally confided to his friends the way to catch fish any old time and in all sorts of weather.

Here's the secret, as told by Sinclair: "Procure a common quart glass milk bottle, place in it a rusty screen-door spring, fasten a rope around the neck of the bottle, and attach a cord to the spring. Let the bottle down into the water, suspended about four feet from the bottom, then jingle the spring and the tinkle is music to any fish that swims.

"That's all there's to it.

"The fish will collect in schools around the bottle and be 'charmed,' and all you have to do is to drop a few lines and hook as many fish as are needed."

Sinclair conceived the idea that fish love music several years ago. While standing on a dock at Macatawa Park, he discovered a number of fish swimming around an old sunken minnow pail. Drawing up the pail he found that the cover was loose and he figured that the action of the water flapped the top against the bottom, producing a tiny sound.

Navies of France and Russia.

The French navy ranks fourth in point of strength when compared to the navies of the world's powers, Great Britain, Germany, and the United States having more and better ships, as well as men. France has seventeen modern battleships, fifteen older battleships, eighteen first-class cruisers, four second-class cruisers, nine third-class cruisers, six gunboats, eighty-seven destroyers, 173 torpedo boats, and ninety submarines, with 60,621 men manning the boats.

Russia's navy ranks sixth, Japan's being fifth. The czar has nine modern battleships, four cruiser battleships, eight older battleships, six first-class cruisers, six second-class cruisers, three third-class cruisers, eight gunboats, 105 destroyers, twenty-three torpedo boats, and forty-eight submarines, with a personnel of officers and men of 52,463.

Two Deliveries Help Him in Double Bills.

Doc Ayers, Washington pitcher and medical student, has a system of pitching double headers that is brand new.

Ayers has often twirled two games in one afternoon. When he does, he pitches one game overhand and the other underhand.

His medical knowledge is the reason for this system.

"A man exercises one set of muscles in pitching underhand and an entirely different set in throwing with an overhand delivery," Ayers said.

"By switching my delivery, I put no more tax on myself in pitching two games than by working one."

Ayers is coming along in great style this year. He looks like another steady winner.

Hits Golf Ball Over Town.

Hans Wagner has succumed to golf, along with many of his well-known associates on some of the other major-league teams. A story is going the rounds of a long drive brought off by Honus on a recent visit to Hot Springs, Va.

Wagner is declared to be a wonder when allowed to play under his own rules. He likes to tee up his ball with considerable sand underneath. He took a notion one day that he would like to drive a ball from the top of a high mountain near the town "just to see what the ball would do." Wagner climbed to the top and drove away. Those who say they saw it, declare the great shortstop's ball flew straight and far across the valley and completely over the town.

It Was Very Good Dynamite! Yes, Very.

A wrecking crew was confronted with a job which seemed impossible when the contents of two cars of dynamite were spilled over the desert at Daggett, Utah, as the result of the derailment of a Salt Lake freight train. How the explosive was spilled without blowing the entire train up remains a mystery. Despite the fact that it failed to go off by a heavy jar, the men handled the sticks with gloves and very gingerly, too. The train contained nothing but cars of fruit and explosives, all marked "handle with care." Eighty tones of dynamite were spilled.

Bather Finds $1,000 in Mud.

Frank Martin, of Allegheny, Pa., while bathing in the river at Baltimore, Md., discovered a box of gold coins valued at more than $1,000. His foot broke through the box, which was buried in the mud. Mr. Martin divided the coins with a friend.

Writes 284 Words in Minute.

In a speed trial held before Judge Sturtevant, presiding over the superior court, at San Francisco, Cal., Lasher B. Gallagher, twenty years old, who has studied stenography only two years, wrote 284 words a minute, which was as fast as anybody in the room could read to him, but apparently not as fast as he could write. In the national shorthand contests, 280 words a minute is the highest reading speed, and in the last contest the winner got 272 words correctly.

He Will Do the Proposing.

Reverend E. D. Cameron, pastor of the Central Baptist Church, at Muskogee, Okla., has offered to take upon himself the duty of proposing marriage to any young woman of the congregation in behalf of any young man in the church who desires to marry her.

The same proposition applies to the young women if they desire to submit such proposal to the young men. Utmost secrecy in all negotiations is promised by the pastor.

Makes Big Hit With Audience.

Manager McGraw, of the New York Giants, is a tactful man if there ever was one. When McGraw was in Pittsburgh, on his vaudeville tour, that grand old hulk, Honus Wagner, drove his auto in from Carnegie to see Scrappy Jawn "act."

"I'm going to have trouble making a hit here," began the Giant manager. "I see your friend Wagner down in front, and it will be tough to get anything by him."

McGraw had his audience from then on, and "got by" bigger and better than he had anticipated.

Gives Street to Children.

From three to six o'clock each afternoon one block's length of street in the crowded East Side, of New York, will be roped off and closed to traffic so that the children of that vicinity may have a playground. This announcement followed a day's trial of the plan. Two street organs provided music for several hundred children, and workers from a settlement taught them dancing.

Will Spend Honeymoon in Far-off Wilderness.

Returning to the land of gold and ice, where her father laid the foundations of his fortune as an Alaskan pioneer, Mrs. Crystal McQueston Mann, Berkeley high-school graduate, society belle, and bride of a few months, is on her way to the desolate Yukon territory back of Dawson, to live the primitive life while her husband searches for the yellow metal in the virgin soil of Alaska.

Few outside of her closest friends knew that Miss McQueston, now Mrs. Mann, is a daughter of a member of the Kokrine tribe of Alaskan Indians, who accompanied the late Leroy Napoleon McQueston back to civilization after he had spent a year in the North, and where he took a girl member of the tribe as his wife. Mrs. Mann will spend several months with her mother's tribe.

Looking for Her Lost Son.

Mrs. Ettie Mary Bishop, of Yuma, Mich., is conducting a nation-wide search for her son, Frank Bishop, who disappeared May 31, 1914. The young man was twenty-five years old, was six feet tall, and had dark eyes, black hair, and a scar on the left side of his upper lip.

United States Will Help Make It "Dry."

Refusal of the Federal government to issue any more internal revenue licenses is the severest blow ever dealt to the liquor interests of Oklahoma. It means the whiping out of bootleg joints. This follows the statement of United States Attorney Linbaugh, that after six months' trial it was found the liquor traffic could not be wiped out unless the Federal government quit issuing internal revenue licenses.

A peculiar feature of the law heretofore was that the Federal government issued the licenses, and Federal officers were instructed to arrest bootleggers on the charge of introducing liquor into the territory.

Walks Forty-four Miles for a Swim.

Forty-four miles as a day's stroll is the record of two girls, Misses Stella Foulkes and Lydia Backhold, of Moorpark, Cal., who walked to Hueneme Beach and back. The girls left here at six o'clock in the morning, ate lunch in Oxford, and reached the beach about an hour later. After an hour in the surf and in rest, the pair started back, refusing "lifts" from friends in motor cars, and reached home, tired but happy, at eight-thirty at night.

Chasing Rabbits Not Work.

If a section hand, hired to mow weeds, lays aside his work to chase a half-grown rabbit, and another section hand swings his scythe and slashes the leg of the man chasing the rabbit, is the injured man entitled to share in workmen's compensation?

That question has been presented to the State Industrial Commission of Ohio. The case came from the Scioto Valley Traction Company, which carries its own insurance.

The company decided the man was not injured in the course of employment, but in an effort to reduce the high cost of living, and compromised by paying his doctor bill. The decision will stand.

Father Sues to Regain Girl.

When Joelda Marie Doughty was only a few days old, five years ago, her mother died. A little later William Kirkwood and wife, of Pittsburg, Kan., took her to rear. John Doughty, the father, married again three years ago, and lives at Mildred, Kan. He has tried to persuade the Kirkwoods to give up their foster child, but they have refused. Joelda Marie was taken into court on a writ of habeas corpus obtained by the father.

Joelda Marie herself is trying to solve the puzzle. She wants to go with her father and she wants to stay with the Kirkwoods. The lawyers, the Kirkwoods, and Doughty and his present wife are trying to settle the problem out of court.

Jockey Club Will Hold Races Without Betting.

Tom McCary, the famous prize-fight promoter, and a number of capitalists have incorporated the Vernon Jockey Club with $500,000 capital, which intends to give Los Angeles, Cal., continuous horse racing in connection with its already continuous baseball and boxing. The new club will make a departure from the old form of racing by owning its own horses, its own jockeys, and absolutely prohibiting betting of all kinds.

The new club has 250 horses and will begin business on New Year's Day. Horses will carry its colors throughout the year. Each day purses will be hung up and jockeys will be paid according to their winnings. The new club will be located in Vernon and will have cafés and many other concessions.

From Ring to Gun Fighting.

Georges Carpentier, white heavyweight champion of Europe, who recently won from Gunboat Smith, the American fighter, on a foul in London, has joined the French army as a volunteer.

Fumes Kill Two in a Silo.

Sadie Kelley, forty years old, and Conley Turner, eighteen, were asphyxiated in a pit silo on the farm of U. G. Mercer, near Wellington, Kan. Eighteen inches of water and ensilage stood in the silo, and Miss Kelley went down to clean it out. Becoming unconscious with the fumes, she fell over into the water and was drowned. Turner attempted to rescue her, but was overcome by the fumes instantly. Several men stood about and feared to make an effort to recover the bodies. C. M. Sayers, a rural route carrier, brought out the woman's body with the help of a rope. He was nearly overcome by the fumes. He asked others to go after the boy's body, but they refused, and he went back and brought up the body. The city pulmotor was hurried to the farm, but it was too late.

Park Scout Catches Bandit.

One of the bandits who robbed the stagecoaches in the Yellowstone National Park recently has been captured in the wilds of Idaho by Jimmy McBride, a noted Yellowstone Park scout, according to a private message received at Helena, Mont.

Discover Cricket Is Natural Thermometer.

If one has no thermometer, he may yet ascertain the temperature pretty accurately should there happen to be a cricket or two upon the premises. Scientists have been studying these little insects pretty carefully of late, and one of the facts at which they have arrived is that the chirp of the cricket is regulated very rigidly by the degree of heat in the atmosphere. As the notes occur at regular intervals, it is a comparatively simple problem in arithmetic, therefore, to deduce the temperature from them.

For instance, it is found that at forty-five degrees centigrade the cricket chirps eighty times in a minute—something over once a second. At twenty-four degrees, his

note is to be heard twice a second, or 120 times per minute. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule, but they are very rare when the insects are under normal conditions.

The scientists who have been studying the matter are of the opinion, indeed, that these natural thermometers proclaim the temperature about as reliably as the ordinary thermometer of commerce.

Wilson Urges All to be Calm.

President Wilson has made an impassioned plea to the American people to maintain their self-possession and calmness of thought during the European crisis in order that the nation as a whole may at all times be ready to render disinterested and beneficial assistance to the rest of the world. The president expressed the opinion that such action on the part of the United States at this time would redound to its permanent glory. He said frankly that there was no cause for alarm on the part of the people of the United States at this time.

He Has no Hands and Writes With His Teeth.

Albert McQuiglin, thirty-two years old, of Terre Haute, Ind., is again under arrest on the charge of forging checks. He has no hands and does the writing with his teeth.

It is his mother's name he is accused of forging. He writes her name so well that only experts can detect her signature is not genuine. When arrested some time ago, his mother made good the amount the son obtained, and he was not prosecuted.

He has been bound over to the circuit court on the latest charge.

Attaches Bell to His Fish Lines.

John Blow, a farmer in Escambia County, Ala., has devised a new method of catching big fish without consuming his time. For years he has been taking large catfish and trout on trot lines. His home and truck farm are on the Conecuh River banks.

By an alarm device he continues his plowing and other work without danger of his fish escaping when hooked. On the ends of the trot lines he fastens small bells.

When they ring during his work hours or in the night, he steps down to the river and pulls in the fish. The device works like a charm and saves much time.

Gets Big Fish With Hands.

While Fred Houser was in bathing below the Neosho River dam at Humboldt, Kan., his arm came in contact with a big catfish. Grasping it to his side, he inserted his other hand into the fish's mouth. A struggle began, and, in spite of Houser's 200 pounds, he was drawn under the water by the fish. He held on, however, and, coming to the surface, shouted for help. Several swimmers came to his assistance. A rope happened to be on the bank. The rope was passed through the fish's gills and, after a struggle, it was brought to land. It weighed sixty-seven pounds. Houser's hand was lacerated.

Prince Would Join the Army.

Prince Roland Bonaparte, a former lieutenant of infantry in the French army and a member of the French institute, who is fifty-six years of age, offered, in a letter sent to President Poincare, to serve in the army, although he said he realizes that the law prohibits princes of a family once reigning in France from enlisting. The prince also puts his several homes at the disposal of the government.

Fear of a Mouse but no Fear of a Bear.

Miss Nancy Lee, of Oak Creek, Cal., while out looking for cows recently, came suddenly upon a ferocious, big black bear. The unexpected meeting startled both Miss Lee and bruin for a time, but the bear, after several moments' inspection of the young woman, turned and ran. In telling of her experience, Miss Lee declared she did not feel the slightest fear while confronting the bear. A moment later she almost went into hysterics. Her auditors looked around. Through a hole in the floor of the grocery store where she was telling of her experience peeped a harmless-looking mouse.

Comet as Seen by Naked Eye.

The Delavan Comet, discovered last December, is visible to the naked eye in the early morning, according to a statement issued from Lick Observatory at San Jose, Cal. The comet is traversing the constellation Auriga and rises well in advance and to the north of the sun. It is as bright as a fifth magnitude star, but the dawn makes it difficult to observe without a telescope and no tail can be distinguished.

The comet is rapidly approaching the sun in its orbit and will pass the sun at the nearest point of approach late in October at a distance of about 100,000,000 miles.

Chicken Swallows a Pearl.

Madeline Tomlinson, a stenographer, of Terre Haute, Ind., was teasing five-year-old Walter Osborn, who lives next door to the Tomlinsons, by pretending to take his pet chicken, holding the fowl on her shoulder. The chicken picked a pendant pearl earring loose from its fastening in Miss Tomlinson's ear and swallowed it. Master Walter says his chicken cannot be killed to recover the earring.

Shot After Attempt to Use Poison Germs.

Telegrams from the chief of the German general staff received at the German embassy at London, assert that a French physician with two assistants tried to poison the wells near Mets with cholera microbes.

The physician was tried by court-martial and then shot. Another French party, according to the same source of information, endeavored to blow up a strategic tunnel near Cochem, on the Moselle. All were shot.

Boy Sixteen, and Girl Fifteen, Marry.

A Tom Thumb wedding, with a real marriage license and a magistrate, took place in Clayton, Mo., when Everett D. Nussman, sixteen years old, became the husband of Lavona Smith, fifteen, both of Witt, Ill.

The bridegroom is small for his age. The bride is about as large as he and is a brunette, while he is a blond. Millard Nussman, father of the boy, and James M. Smith, the girl's father, were the attendants.

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